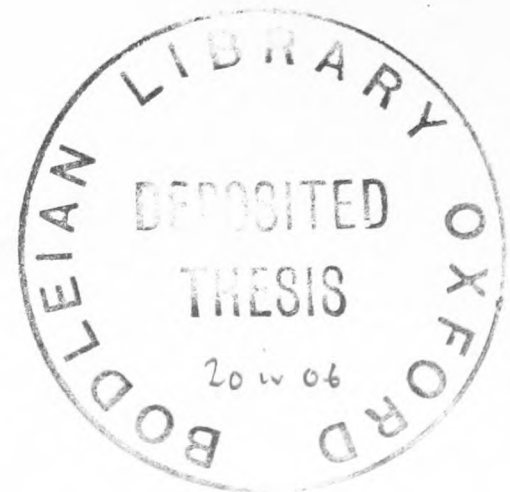


Milton and Superfluity

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis proceeds from the observation that Milton is concerned by the presence of surplus material in the physical world. The blind Pharisee in *Samson Agonistes* dismisses his ‘redundant locks, / Robustious to no purpose clustering down.’ In the Ludlow masque, Comus complains that the Lady’s ‘moral babble’ would leave nature ‘strangled with her waste fertility.’ Creation, in *Paradise Lost*, requires the expulsion of ‘black tartareous cold infernal dregs’ and leaves behind an abyss full of matter. Adam and Eve live in a garden where the sun shines with more warmth than they need, where the nighttime sky is bright with a perplexing canopy of lights. Vines and overgrown branches threaten to make their walks unpassable, while fruit, uncollected and uneaten, falls to the ground.

An interest in superfluity is a characteristic feature of Milton’s imagination. He insists on limits, then turns to what is left out as excess or waste. This habit of mind influences Milton’s description of acts of choosing and gives shape to his account of the relationship between creation and God. It complicates his answer to the sort of question Augustine asks of God in the *Confessions*: ‘Do heaven and earth contain you because you have filled them? Or do you fill them and overflow them because they do not contain you?’ Milton is troubled by the idea of purposeless divine work. He is bothered by the thought of a creation that is useless or unnecessary. In *Paradise Lost*, I argue, the reason for the existence for the world is tied to the reason for sin.

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This thesis is for my father and my sister, and for the memory of my mother.

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Texts and Abbreviations

All citations to the poems of Milton are to the two Longman volumes: John Milton, *Complete Shorter Poems*, ed. John Carey (second ed., London, 1997), and John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Alastair Fowler (second ed., London, 1998).

References to the prose in English are to *The Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, ed. Don M. Wolfe et al. (8 vols.; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953-82), everywhere abbreviated *CPW*. References in Latin are to *The Works of John Milton*, ed. Frank Allen Patterson et al. (18 vols.; New York: Columbia University Press, 1931-38), everywhere abbreviated *Col*.

Abbreviations for the titles of several frequently cited works are given, with their bibliographical details, in the first relevant footnote. Citations of the Bible, unless otherwise noted, refer to the Authorized Version.

Introduction

Abraham Cowley compares creation to the work of a writer. The shape of the world, he says, comes to God like the idea for a poem. In the beginning, the heavens and earth have the riotous quality of words without syntax. Then they are steadied, as by meter:

As first a various unform'd *Hint* we find
 Rise in some god-like *Poet's* fertile *Mind*,
 'Till all the Parts and Words their Places take,
 And with just Marches *Verse* and *Musick* make:
 Such was *God's Poem*, this *World's* new *Essay*;
 So wild and rude in its first Draught it lay;
 Th'ungovern'd parts no *Correspondence* knew,
 An artless *War* from thwarting *Motions* grew;
 Till they to *Number* and fixt Rules were brought
 By the *eternal Mind's Poetick Thought* . . .
 The *Motions* strait, and round, and swift, and slow,
 And *short*, and *long*, were mix't and woven so,
 Did in such artful *Figures* smoothly fall,
 As made this decent measur'd *Dance* of *All*.¹

This is a remarkable act of composition. There are no cancelled phrases, no digressions. The blotches and spills of the first draft find their place in a process that is no different from putting together an extremely complicated jigsaw puzzle. The creation of man is like the publication of a pocket-size edition. God repeats the work on a smaller scale: 'Him he all things with strange Order hurl'd / In him, that *full Abridgment* of the *World*' (1.827-28).

In a piece for the *London Magazine* in 1820, Charles Lamb recalls his distress at learning that Milton is quite different from the 'god-like *Poet*' whom Cowley describes. He writes of being shown manuscripts of 'Lycidas' and other poems at Trinity College, Cambridge. To his horror, they are full of mistakes, corrections, crossings-out. 'I wish they had thrown them in the Cam, or sent them after the latter Cantos of Spenser, into the

¹ Abraham Cowley, *Davideis*, 1.447-64. I refer to the second volume of Cowley's *Complete Works in Verse and Prose*, ed. Alexander B. Grosart (Edinburgh, 1881).

Irish Channel. How it staggered me to see the fine things in their ore!’² The sight of interlineations and castaway phrases, of passages once or even twice rewritten, forces Lamb to consider the possibility that the words of ‘Lycidas’ might have been ‘otherwise, and just as good.’ No longer is he able to think of the poem springing up ‘with all its parts absolute.’ The consequence, for Lamb, is a newfound revulsion from the written hand. ‘The text never seems determinate. Print settles it.’³ (This passage, in a curious irony, was stricken from later versions of the essay.)

Among the details we have of Milton’s old age — the ‘Grey Camblet Coat’ of a Quaker cut, the swing on which he took exercise — there is the report that he liked to sit in an easy chair, with a leg hanging over one of the arms, and dictate *Paradise Lost*: ‘perhaps 40 Lines as it were in a breath, and then reduce them to half the Number.’⁴ The story, whatever its authenticity,⁵ calls attention to a crowdedness in the poem that readers have associated with a deliberate process of compression. More than a century ago, Walter Raleigh wrote of the ‘economy in every trifle’ of *Paradise Lost*. He compared Milton’s style to a tight dress. Unlike Spenser, Raleigh argued, whose meaning eddies and diffuses through the spacious insides of his stanzas, Milton aims for a work that is

² Charles Lamb, ‘Oxford in the Vacation,’ which appeared in the *London Magazine* of October 1820. See *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb*, ed. E.V. Lucas (London, 1903), Vol. 2, 311.

³ Lamb, in the *Works*, ed. Lucas (1903), Vol. 2, 311. An examination of the Trinity manuscript, sensitive to the ‘saying “not this, not that”’ which ‘was as much a part of Milton’s creativity as the original version,’ appears in Leslie Brisman, *Milton’s Poetry of Choice and Its Romantic Heirs* (Ithaca, NY, 1973), 26-34. Of particular relevance to this discussion is Brisman’s distinction between “‘and” poetry’ and “‘or” poetry.’

⁴ See Jonathan Richardson (Junior and Senior), *Explanatory Notes and Remarks on Milton’s ‘Paradise Lost’* (London, 1734), cxiv. The swing and pulley appear in John Toland’s *Life* (London, 1698), which is reprinted in *The Early Lives of Milton*, ed. Helen Darbishire (London, 1932), 194. For the style of Milton’s coat, again see the Richardsons’ *Explanatory Notes* (1734), iv.

⁵ The account resembles, suspiciously, what Suetonius tells us of Virgil, that he composed long passages of the *Georgics* in the morning, then cut them down in the afternoon, ‘wittily remarking that he fashioned his poem after the manner of a she-bear, and gradually licked it into shape.’ See *De Viris Illustribus*, in the Loeb edition of Suetonius’s *Works*, trans. J.C. Rolfe (rev. ed., New York, 1930), Vol. 2, 471-73. For further comment, see Allen H. Gilbert, *On the Composition of ‘Paradise Lost’* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1947), 4-11. David Masson opines that this ‘cannot . . . have ever been his [Milton’s] habit,’ in *The Life of John Milton* (second ed., London, 1880), Vol. 6, 466.

congested with sound and thought. Non-essential words are removed, ‘all superfluous graces are . . . discarded’; even the blank verse is without extrametrical syllables.⁶ The same phenomenon attracted the attention of the Richardsons, who offer this advice in their *Explanatory Notes* of 1734:

A Reader of *Milton* must be Always upon Duty; he is Surrounded with Sense, it rises in every Line, every Word is to the Purpose; There are no Lazy Intervals, All has been Consider’d, and Demands, and Merits Observation. Even in the Best Writers you Sometimes find Words and Sentences which hang on so Loosely you may Blow ’em off, *Milton’s* are all Substance and Weight: Fewer would not have Serv’d the Turn, and More would have been Superfluous.⁷

Samuel Johnson compared Milton’s mind to a furnace, which smelted his learning to purify it from ‘its grosser parts.’⁸ For Raleigh, ‘the study of Milton, if it teaches anything, teaches to discard and to abhor all superfluity.’ The lesson, he admitted, was wearying. ‘For perfect and ready assimilation, some bulk and distention are necessary in language as in diet.’ He advised an occasional holiday, spent nibbling on a novel, or Milton’s prose.⁹

Other readers have felt that *Paradise Lost* contains enough indigestible matter as it is. In a recent article, William Kerrigan writes of passages that have ‘inspired some of the deepest yawns in the history of reading.’¹⁰ William Empson was irritated by muddles; he complained of inconsistencies in the poem that lacked ‘serious forces at work in them,’ and concluded that Milton had left ‘a grim posterity of shoddy thinking in

⁶ Raleigh’s discussion appears in *Milton* (London, 1900), 197-214. On the disuse of extrametrical syllables in *Paradise Lost*, and their frequency in the early poems, see Robert Bridges, *Milton’s Prosody* (rev. ed., Oxford, 1921), 4-37.

⁷ Richardson (Junior and Senior), *Explanatory Notes* (1734), cxliv. This does *not* mean that the poetry is all fixed outlines, with no dimension of latency, no mist of images and undiscovered paths — that the lark, as the Richardsons write elsewhere, does not ‘Sing after he is Lost in Air’ (41).

⁸ Samuel Johnson, ‘Milton’ (1779), in his *Lives of the English Poets*, ed. George Birbeck Hill (London, 1905), Vol. 1, 171, 177. To the second edition, he added the famous remark that ‘no one wished it [*Paradise Lost*] longer than it is,’ but, as Hill notes, Johnson held this to be true of all books ‘written by mere man’ except *Don Quixote*, *Robinson Crusoe*, and *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. See the *Lives*, Vol. 1, 183-84.

⁹ Raleigh, *Milton* (1900), 214.

¹⁰ William Kerrigan, ‘Complicated Monsters: Essence and Metamorphosis in Milton,’ *TSSL* 46 (2004), 324.

blank verse.’¹¹ Macaulay is supposed to have said that Milton’s reputation would have been higher if the last eight books of the epic had been lost. ‘He would then have been placed above Homer.’¹² Even Addison, whose eye for ‘excrescence’ had been trained by the earlier books of *Paradise Lost*, recommended that the poem’s last two lines be excised. ‘Though they have their beauty,’ they ‘fall very much below the foregoing passage,’ and reduce our confidence in the promise of redemption.¹³

The most thorough identifications of surplus come from Walter Savage Landor. One of his *Imaginary Conversations* describes the persons of Landor and Robert Southey taking in a view near Clifton and then pulling copies of Milton from their pockets. Since the poet’s merits are well known, and too numerous to discuss in one sitting, they agree instead to set out his ‘graver flaws.’ The first criticisms are unremarkable. The men agree that there are defects in the plan of *Paradise Lost*. The moral is wearying. The epic lacks a ‘principal character.’ After a few moments, Southey turns to the beginning of the poem and makes the interesting suggestion that it would be improved by the removal of several verses. The first five lines, he says, can be reduced to three. Gone from Milton’s sweep through human history are the references to redemption and ‘one greater man’ (1.4-5), as being too full of ‘encumbrances, and deadeners of harmony.’ The sentence that opens the epic is still too long. It leaves the reader gasping for breath, Landor says. And there is no need for Milton to make note of his ‘advent’rous song’ and ‘things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme’ (1.14-16). ‘Supposing the fact to be true, the

¹¹ William Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral* (London, 1935), 155-56.

¹² The remark appears in Sir George Otto Trevelyan, *The Life and Letters of Lord Macaulay* (London, 1932), Vol. 2, 140.

¹³ Addison, in *Spectator* 369, 3 May 1712. See *The Works of the Right Honourable Joseph Addison*, ed. Richard Hurd, rev. Henry Bohn (London, 1889-93), Vol. 3, 281. In *Spectator* 215, 1 March 1712, Addison calls the invocation to Book 3 ‘an excrescence,’ not ‘an essential part of the poem.’ See the *Works*, Vol. 3, 223. Samuel Johnson adds the ‘short digressions’ that begin Books 7 and 9. They ‘might doubtless be spared; but superfluities so beautiful who would take away?’ See the *Lives*, ed. Hill (1905), Vol. 1, 175.

mention of it is unnecessary and unpoetical.’¹⁴ The two men proceed in this manner through the entire epic. Book by book, they snip away bad puns, improprieties, feeble lines, disgusting lines, overgrown metaphors, recurrences of sound, and anything else ‘useless or injurious.’ To Book 6, Southey makes ‘larger defalcations,’ lopping off the hundred and seventy lines that tell of the Son’s entrance to the battle in Heaven. The prologue at the beginning of Book 9 is excised. So is the speech in Book 10 in which Adam rebuffs Eve and calls her an adversary, a serpent. This ‘long and somewhat foul excrescence,’ with ‘coarse invectives against the female sex,’ contains ‘reflections more suitable to the character and experience of Milton than of Adam,’ Southey says. ‘I would insert my pruning knife at verse 871 . . . and cut clean through.’¹⁵ By far the most ambitious deletion is from Book 2. Satan’s interview with Sin and Death divides the early critics of *Paradise Lost*, and Landor represents both sides of the debate when he says that it contains ‘a wonderful vigour of imagination or thought’ with ‘much of what is odious and intolerable.’ In Southey’s opinion, the whole episode is unsalvageable. He recommends its removal, along with the journey through chaos and the meeting between Satan and the Anarch — nearly three hundred and fifty lines.¹⁶ Landor, later, justifies their project. ‘It is difficult to sweep away any thing and not to sweep away gold-dust with it: but viler dust lies thick in some places. The grave Milton, too, has cobwebs hanging on his workshop, which a high broom, in a steady hand, may reach without doing mischief.’¹⁷

Milton would not have been surprised by this debate. A decade after writing of

¹⁴ Walter Savage Landor, ‘Southey and Landor’ (first conversation), in *Imaginary Conversations*, ed. Charles G. Crump (London, 1891), Vol. 4, 201-3.

¹⁵ Landor, *Imaginary Conversations* (1891), Vol. 4, 224, 228, 237.

¹⁶ Landor, *Imaginary Conversations* (1891), Vol. 4, 210.

¹⁷ ‘Southey and Landor’ (second conversation), in *Imaginary Conversations* (1891), Vol. 4, 264. The two men are careful to distance their work from that of Richard Bentley, whose notorious revised edition of *Paradise Lost* (London, 1732) addressed mistakes that Bentley believed had slipped past the blind poet. ‘Bentley in many things was very acute,’ Landor says, ‘but his criticisms on poetry produce the same effect as the water of a lead mine on plants’ (242).

the exuberance risked by readers of Shakespeare — ‘thou our fancy of itself bereaving / Doth make us marble with too much conceiving’ — he was aware that his own talent came with dust and cobwebs, rather than ‘easy numbers,’ or papers having scarcely a blot.¹⁸ Published in 1642, *The Reason of Church-Government* introduces a broad claim about human works. Of the mess that accompanies the building of a Church, Milton writes that it is characteristic of all creative endeavour. Shavings and debris are part of the process:

In things artificall, seldome any elegance is wrought without a superfluous wast and refuse in the transaction. No Marble statue can be politely carv’d, no fair edifice built without almost as much rubbish and sweeping. Insomuch that even in the spirituall conflict of S. *Pauls* conversion there fell scales from his eyes that were not perceav’d before. No wonder then in the reforming of a Church which is never brought to effect without the fierce encounter of truth and falshood together, if, as it were the splinters and shares of so violent a jousting, there fall from between the shock so many fond errors and fanatick opinions, which when truth has the upper hand, and the reformation shall be perfeted, will easily be rid out of the way, or kept so low, as that they shall be only the exercise of our knowledge, not the disturbance, or interruption of our faith. (CPW 1.795-96)

We shall see that it is typical of Milton to focus his attention, when he reads Acts 9, on the scales that drop from Paul’s eyes; when he writes figuratively of combat, to remember that there are still splinters.¹⁹ He starts from the necessity of limits, then turns with a keen eye to what is left out as excess or waste. This distinctive movement is evident near the close of *Areopagitica*. Milton describes a ‘mansion house of liberty,

¹⁸ ‘On Shakespeare’ (1630), ll. 13-14. John Carey, in his edition of the *Complete Shorter Poems* (second ed., London, 1997), recalls the note affixed by John Heming and Henry Condell to the First Folio (London, 1623, A³): Shakespeare’s ‘mind and hand went together: And what he thought, he uttered with that easinesse, that wee have scarce received from him a blot in his papers.’ In ‘The Passion,’ Milton makes an attempt to ‘confine [his] roving verse’ (22) and declares his tears ‘so well instructed . . . that they would fitly fall in ordered characters’ (48-49). But the poem, interestingly, is unfinished. One recalls, here, Leonardo’s suggestion in his *Treatise on Painting* that the untidiness and irregularity of the artist’s work distinguish it from a tradesman’s. ‘Have you never thought about how poets compose their verse? They do not trouble to trace beautiful letters nor do they mind crossing out several lines to make them better. So, painter, rough out the arrangement of the limbs of your figures and first attend to the movements of the mental state of the creatures that make up your picture rather than to the beauty and perfection of their parts.’ The translation is by E.H. Gombrich, and appears in his *Norm and Form* (London, 1966), 59.

¹⁹ Milton describes ‘splinters and shares,’ the latter word an archaic noun whose root survives in the verb ‘to shear.’ A share, in this sense, is ‘a piece hewn out, or cut or torn away.’ The *Oxford English Dictionary* (second ed., Oxford, 1989; hereafter, *OED*) gives the passage from *The Reason of Church-Government* as an example of this usage.

encompass and surrounded with his protection.’ Armaments stand ready for the ‘defence of beleaguer’d Truth’ (CPW 2.554). Men who are wary of sects are asked to remember that the structure itself is the product of division. Before walls can rise, ‘there must be many schisms and many dissections made in the quarry and in the timber’; marble must be cut, trees stripped and sawed. What about the pieces that do not fit, the odds and ends left on the workbench? Milton gives them their own music. ‘If men be erroneous who appear to be the leading schismatics,’ they are ‘but as the dust and cinders of our feet’; ‘so long as in that notion they may yet serve to polish and brighten the armoury of Truth, ev’n for that respect they were not utterly to be cast away’ (CPW 2.567).

Mess and surplus are important to a writer so concerned with acts of decision. Milton’s long poems describe temptations in which agents are required to choose: A, *not* B. These choices naturally generate refuse. This consequence is most obvious in another passage in *Areopagitica*, in which Milton compares the selections of a reader to the consumption of manna by the Israelites in the desert. The foodstuff first appears in the sixteenth chapter of Exodus. It rains down from heaven in the morning and melts away once the sun is hot, and the Jews cannot keep stores of it. The lesson would seem to be faith: trust in a God who renews His promise of nourishment. For Milton, however, the story is about moderation. Deliberately overlooking the finer details of the biblical narrative, he suggests that manna was gathered ‘without particular law or prescription,’ and given by God in great quantities.²⁰ ‘That Omer which was every mans daily portion of Manna, is computed to have bin more than might well have suffic’d the heartiest feeder thrice as many meals’ (CPW 2.513-14). On this view, which has no basis in Scripture, the choice to eat temperately involves accepting that a large portion of the divine provision will go to waste. In the same way, Milton argues later, the work of apprehending vice — of knowing good and evil, and preferring ‘that

²⁰ The Israelites follow more than a few divine commands: to ‘gather of it [manna] every man according to his eating’ (Exodus 16:16), and twice as much before the Sabbath, for example; to save a serving of it for future generations, that they may know how God fed their ancestors in the wilderness.

which is truly better' (CPW 2.514-15) — requires an act of culling.²¹

Milton's interest in superfluity shapes his understanding of the relationship between the created world and God. It is constitutive, I shall argue, to his description of freedom. This thesis follows Milton variously, through discussions of stars and hair, of gardens and other worlds. This is a poet of angelic digestion,²² who writes of the unrubbing that is the responsibility of every person born with original sin. 'It is not man as regenerate creature, but man as an animal, that begets man: just as the seed, though cleansed from straw and chaff, produces not only the ear or the grain but also the stalk and the husk.'²³ Keats complained of 'Miltons gormandizing,' and wrote of 'Miltons head' as a moon, which 'attracted the Intellect to its flow,' and 'left the shore pebble all bare.' In 'The Fall of Hyperion,' he found a more fitting and Miltonic statement of the problem by beginning with the sight of empty shells, half-eaten bunches of grapes: 'the refuse of a meal / By angel tasted, or our Mother Eve.'²⁴

Late in the *Confessions*, Augustine asks himself a bold question about the Creator. 'How did you make heaven and earth, and what machine did you use for so vast an operation?'²⁵ If we have been reading attentively thus far, we may guess at Augustine's reply. Since he holds that God created the world *ex nihilo*, the idea of a machine of any kind is absurd. What would it have been made out of? From what

²¹ He compares the task to the seed-sorting forced on Psyche by Venus. The episode appears in the fifth book of Apuleius's *Metamorphoses*. I return to it in Chapter 1.

²² In *Paradise Lost*, Raphael announces to Adam and Eve that Heavenly beings feel real hunger, then tells of their excretions: 'What redounds, transpires, / Through spirits with ease' (5.438-39).

²³ *De Doctrina Christiana* 1.11, in CPW 6.389. Hereafter *DDC*. An early and incomplete version of the act appears in Book 11 of *Paradise Lost*, where we learn that the false fruit has caused a film to cover Adam's eyes. Michael peels it away and purges Adam's 'visual nerve' (11.415), that he may see the results of sin.

²⁴ 'The Fall of Hyperion. A Dream,' ll. 29-35, in Keats's *Complete Poems*, ed. John Barnard (London, 1973). The observations about Milton appear in a letter to James Rice, 24 March 1818, which appears in *The Letters of John Keats, 1814-1821*, ed. Hyder Edward Rollins (Cambridge, MA, 1918), Vol. 1, 255.

²⁵ Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford, 1991), 11.5. Citations follow the Benedictine paragraph numbering, and hereafter appear parenthetically, marked by C.

matter would God have gotten His chisel or saw? Augustine's answer takes just this course. He adds that it is also incorrect to think of God as a craftsman. Such a man 'imposes form on what already exists and possesses being'; he needs a block of stone or a ball of clay to begin with. 'These materials exist,' Augustine reminds himself, 'only because you [God] first had made them' (C 11.5).

Let us say, for a moment, that we can get around this problem. Suppose we are able to demonstrate that matter was already present when God set out to fashion the world. Does the analogy between the Creator and a great craftsman now make sense? In the sixteenth century, Paracelsus attempted it. 'A woodcarver,' he wrote, 'is able to carve out of wood whatever he pleases, provided that he can separate the wood from that which does not belong to it. Thus also God took out, drew out, and separated all His creatures from one mass and material, and He left no chips in the process.'²⁶ The basic intuition that God formed the world by giving unique shapes to a generic first material is familiar in Christian thought. The peculiarity of Paracelsus's account lies, rather, in his effort to match up the two sides of the comparison he has chosen. The result is a curious problem. When a craftsman works, bits of stone and wood are discarded and fall away. Is God, likewise, capable of a creation that includes such refuse? Paracelsus argues that He is not: *he left no chips in the process*. But what else could have been the result when God separated 'the wood from that which [did] not belong to it'? There is the related difficulty, too, that God created all the matter that existed in the first place. What else could it have been but wood?

The first chapter of this study finds Milton resisting the solution that Paracelsus falls back on. In *Paradise Lost*, God *does* leave chips behind. I argue that Milton strays from familiar accounts of creation chiefly in two areas. He presents the origin of matter *ex Deo*, not *ex nihilo*. And he depicts a universe containing more material than God needs, with plenty left over to batter the walls of the heavens and earth. An abyss,

²⁶ Paracelsus (Theophrastus von Hohenheim), *Selected Writings*, trans. Norbert Guterman (London, 1951), 14. I owe my knowledge of this text to John Rogers, who refers to it in *The Matter of Revolution* (Ithaca, NY, 1996), 135 n. 61.

boundless and full, surrounds the new world after the Son marks its limits. Chapter 1 begins with the views of creation that Milton has not chosen, and looks with particular care at the discussions in Augustine and in Plato's *Timaeus*. After considering Milton's dismissal of these alternatives, the argument turns to the chaos described in *Paradise Lost*. The most serious difficulties that result from its persistence involve the well-known statement in *De Doctrina Christiana* that unformed matter 'was not an evil thing, nor to be thought of as worthless' (CPW 6.308). The epic, I suggest, brings into question both halves of this statement: 'not evil,' and, more urgently perhaps, 'not worthless.'

Chapter 2 starts from the suggestion that a similar reckoning of boundaries and rubbish is apparent in Milton's writings on ecclesiastical reform. In the pamphlets against the episcopacy, a quarter of a century before *Paradise Lost*, he describes a muscular Church to be born from a flotsam of human invention. Scripture alone must dictate its construction. In *The Reason of Church-Government* and *An Apology against a Pamphlet*, Milton insists on the separateness of the rule of God from opinions concerning what he calls the 'part of the Temple which is not measur'd,' and therefore left to men. The work that follows the anti-prelatical tracts, however, shows Milton moving closer to the antinomianism he accepts in *Paradise Lost* and in *De Doctrina*. He begins, I argue, to identify surplus in the divine word. The second part of this chapter looks at Milton's exegesis of biblical commands concerning marriage. He writes in *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* of instances in which 'we are not to repose . . . upon the literall terms of so many words,' and Christ administers 'one excesse against another to reduce us to a perfect mean' (CPW 2.282-83). A view of liberty emerges in the divorce tracts that may be described in terms of an exchange between two types of arbitrary behaviour: one associated with the capricious actions of a tyrant, the other with right reason and the individual. In 1700, Mary Astell objected, rightly, that Milton's argument for divorce ignored the suffering of women. 'For whatever may be said against Passive-Obedience in another case, I suppose there's no Man but likes it very

well in this; how much soever Arbitrary Power may be dislik'd on a Throne, not Milton himself would cry up Liberty to poor Female Slaves, or plead for the Lawfulness of Resisting a Private Tyranny.'²⁷ The final section of Chapter 2 wonders whether the expectation at the centre of Astell's complaint is miscast. I contend that external forces reduce the freedom that Milton rescues, for men, from the excesses of Scripture.

Chapter 3 steers the argument from what lies outside limits and circumscriptions to what is contained within them. We turn to Eden, where the distinction between the created world and chaos is framed in miniature. The walls of Paradise set the garden apart from the wilderness surrounding it. Inside, however, is a place of overgrowth and tangles, requiring constant attention from its human caretakers. The discussion begins with the perplexing subject of prelapsarian labour. The efforts of Adam and Eve to tend to Paradise are taxing, I argue, and counter the common objection that life in the garden was too boring or too easy to have trained the spirit for the ascension described by Raphael. Section two suggests that the voluptuous profusion of Milton's Eden introduces a new set of problems into *Paradise Lost*. Two generations of critics have now argued that the hard work required to keep back the garden's excessive growth is a figure for the effort necessary for temperance. The unfallen battle against Eden's natural superflux instructs Adam and Eve in the more challenging work that must take place within themselves. The trouble with this claim is that it assumes that the labour in Paradise is successful. But it is not, and never can be. Eden is so abundant, and control over the place is so impossible, that the richly imagined symbolic equivalence breaks down.

Thoreau wrote in *Walden* that he was cheered by the sight of vultures and carrion, and recalled his satisfaction at a dead horse that rotted beside the path near his house. What pleased him was the 'inexhaustible vigour' of the world beyond himself.

²⁷ Mary Astell, *Reflections upon Marriage* (third ed., London, 1706), 27. I owe my knowledge of this work to Mary Nyquist, who discusses it in 'The Genesis of Gendered Subjectivity in the Divorce Tracts and in *Paradise Lost*,' in *Re-membering Milton*, ed. Mary Nyquist and Margaret W. Ferguson (New York, 1987), 123.

'I love to see that Nature is so rife with life that myriads can be afforded to be sacrificed and suffered to prey on one another; that tender organizations can be so serenely squashed out of existence like pulp, — tadpoles which herons gobble up, and tortoises, and toads run over in the road.'²⁸ The extravagance of nature is the subject of a splendid poem by A.R. Ammons called 'The City Limits':

When you consider the radiance, that it does not withhold
itself but pours its abundance without selection into every
nook and cranny not overhung or hidden; when you consider

that birds' bones make no awful noise against the light but
lie low in the light as in a high testimony; when you consider
the radiance, that it will look into the guiltiest

swervings of the weaving heart and bear itself upon them,
not flinching into disguise or darkening; when you consider
the abundance of such resource as illuminates the glow-blue

bodies and gold-skeined wings of flies swarming the dumped
guts of a natural slaughter or the coil of shit and in no
way winces from its storms of generosity; when you consider

that air or vacuum, snow or shale, squid or wolf, rose or lichen,
each is accepted into as much light as it will take, then
the heart moves roomier, the man stands and looks about, the

leaf does not increase itself above the grass, and the dark
work of the deepest cells is of a tune with May bushes
and fear lit by the breadth of such calmly turns to praise.²⁹

Milton is far more hesitant about the abundance and waste he perceives in creation. He speculates, as early as 1629, about the efficiency of God's hand. 'Can we believe . . . that the vast spaces of boundless air are illuminated and adorned with everlasting lights, that these are endowed with such rapidity of motion and pass through such infinite revolutions, merely to serve as a lantern for the base and slothful, and to light the path of the idle and the sluggard here below? Do we perceive no purpose in the luxuriance of fruit and herb beyond the short-lived beauty of nature?' (*CPW* 1.291-92). More than two decades later, we find Milton appraising his own blunted utility. The famous sonnet

²⁸ Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*, ed. Bill McKibben (Boston, 1997), 297. Richard Poirier introduces this passage to his discussion of Emersonian superfluity in *Poetry and Pragmatism* (Cambridge, MA, 1992), 37-78.

²⁹ A.R. Ammons, in the *Collected Poems, 1951-1971* (New York, 1972), 320.

on his blindness describes a ‘talent . . . lodged with [him] useless’ and accepts the possibility of a life utterly without profit to Heaven. God ‘doth not need / Either man’s work or his own gifts.’³⁰ A poem addressed to Cyriack Skinner, in the same period, takes a different course. It presents the consoling knowledge that Milton’s eyes have not gone dark in vain. ‘What supports me dost thou ask? / The conscience, friend, to have lost them overplied / In liberty’s defence, my noble task.’³¹

Chapter 4 suggests that Milton is made anxious, especially in the later poetry, by the thought of divine work that is redundant or without use. Part one examines the debate over natural surplus in the Ludlow masque. Part two returns to *Paradise Lost*, and discusses Adam and Eve’s confusion over the excesses to be found in Eden and in the nighttime sky. The chapter concludes by looking at the meditation over purpose that is at the centre of *Samson Agonistes*. This play of ‘causeless suffering’ (700), of ‘redundant locks / Robustious to no purpose clustering down’ (567-68), requires its audience to evaluate an affirmation of function: to decide whether God would allow the Nazarite ‘to sit idle with so great a gift / Useless, and thence ridiculous about him’ (1500-1).

Chapter 5 follows this line of thought by studying Adam’s question in Book 7 of *Paradise Lost*. ‘What cause / Moved the creator in his holy rest / Through all eternity so late to build / In chaos’ (7.90-93)? Readers since Patrick Hume have assumed that this inquiry concerns the timing of creation, but Adam’s interest is just as likely to be teleological. His question introduces into *Paradise Lost* the difficult matter of God’s motive for creation. Since the world is fashioned in order to return to Heaven by a long process of refinement, it is hard to see why God has bothered to make it at all. The final pages of this study relate the problem suggested by Adam’s ‘what cause’ in Book 7 to the ‘what cause’ with which the epic opens. ‘What cause / Moved our grand parents . . . to fall off / From their creator’ (1.28-31)? The purpose of the world, I argue, may lie in

³⁰ ‘When I consider how my light is spent,’ 3-4, 9-10.

³¹ ‘Cyriack, this three years’ day these eyes, though clear,’ 9-11.

its imperfection.

Writing this thesis, I have often thought about the other forms that a work of its title might have taken. A few of these alternate versions have appeared for readers in the last decade. We are fortunate now to have a study of the classical mean in the early modern period, one that gives ample attention to *Paradise Lost* and to 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso.'³² Another recent book brings us a Milton who has an appreciation for economic theory.³³ John Rogers has written of the poet's interest in superflux as a consequence of his intellectual engagement with the science and political science of the vitalist movement.³⁴ What follows is not quite the examination of Miltonic messes imagined by David Trotter,³⁵ nor is it a study of more abstract concerns about the excess of meaning in poetic language, or of the concepts of exorbitance and supplementarity that Derrida drew from his reading of Rousseau.³⁶ To me, it seemed possible to concentrate on a series of speculative questions raised by the poetry. Buried in David Masson's vast and wise biography of Milton is a sentence that now sounds hagiographic: 'We regard the series of thoughts that was in his mind through any month, or series of months, as a prize we would give gold to recover.'³⁷ One continues to hope that there is interest in the twistings and rotundity of this magnificent intelligence.

³² See Joshua Scodel, *Excess and the Mean in Early Modern Literature* (Princeton, 2002).

³³ See Blair Hoxby, *Mammon's Music* (New Haven, 2002). On the same subject, but more immediately relevant to this discussion, is John Guillory, 'From the Superfluous to the Supernumerary,' in *Soliciting Interpretation*, ed. Elizabeth Harvey and Katherine Maus (Chicago, 1990), 68-88.

³⁴ Rogers, *The Matter of Revolution* (1996).

³⁵ David Trotter, *Cooking with Mud* (Oxford, 2000), 16.

³⁶ See Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore, 1974), 141-64.

³⁷ Masson, *Life* (1880), Vol. 3, 52.

I : The Birth of Matter

At the moment just before the world's creation in *Paradise Lost*, the Son stands before the shores of Heaven, watching the swells of chaos continue their outrageous assault. At last, he speaks: 'Silence, ye troubled waves, and thou Deep, peace . . . your discord end' (7.216-17). The command is surprising. 'Let there be light,' the divine imperative of Genesis 1:3, is postponed as the Son first seeks calm. To this most familiar of narratives Milton has added a kind of prehistory. Reading into the story Jesus's words to the Sea of Galilee, 'he rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still' (Mark 4:39), Milton pushes back the creation of light so that we may observe an earlier act, the ordering that leaves the earth 'self-balanced' and joins together 'like substances to like.'

The Son's extraordinary demand for silence is the assertion of an earlier kind of beginning, the start of a creation narrative that emphasizes its departure from the orthodox, *ex nihilo* account. Between 'Deep' and 'peace,' we pause: the ocean rests, the winds grow quiet. The Son moves out into the uncreated womb to draw the world's boundaries with His golden compass. The imaginative intensity of the scene is so great, and the poetry is so lovely, that we are liable to forget how unfamiliar it all looks. Where has this chaos come from, and what is its moral nature? Milton does not tell us. There are suggestions of a dangerous picture. The Latin noun *furor* — *Furor impius*, for Virgil, the terrible creature roaring with bloodstained lips¹ — stands behind Milton's description of chaos's 'furious winds.' Waves threaten God's shores 'as mountains to assault / Heaven's height' (7.214-15), the mountains upturned as weapons in Book 6 still so fresh in the mind. We may wish to ask why Milton has presented the history of creation as he has: with such insistence upon the vast material of the abyss, with the

¹ *Aeneid* 1.294. All citations of Virgil refer to the Latin text of Sir R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969).

Spirit of God shaping only what is inside the circle marked out by the Son. Within these boundaries, moreover — before we even arrive at the moment when light springs from the deep — God has ‘downward purged / The black tartareous cold infernal dregs / Adverse to life’ (7.235-37). Where has all this matter come from, and where has this chilly waste now been sent?

To understand why creation looks as it does in *Paradise Lost*, we will need, first of all, to get a sense of the choices that have pushed the poet’s imagination in such an unusual direction. This chapter starts by looking at the most significant of these decisions, Milton’s preference for creation *ex Deo* over creation *ex nihilo*. I turn, then, to the accounts of the world’s first matter in *De Doctrina Christiana* and *Paradise Lost*. A.S.P. Woodhouse once derided the tendency, among scholars, to describe two Miltons, ‘a poetical Dr Jekyll and a theological . . . Mr Hyde.’² It will seem to us, as we proceed, that Woodhouse has gotten the analogy backwards: that it is the poet who tramples over the orderly work of the theologian.

I.

The Bible does not discuss the origin of matter. This is the first trouble for Milton. The ‘earth . . . unformed and void’ exists in Genesis 1:2 because God created it. Speculation about the source and nature of the material of which it is composed belongs to a different tradition.³ When Milton jabs at the ‘moderns’ in *De Doctrina*, because they believe that ‘everything was formed out of nothing (which is, I fancy, what their own theory is based on!),’ the joke hits dangerously close to home.⁴ The poet’s own look

² A.S.P. Woodhouse, *The Heavenly Muse*, ed. Hugh MacCallum (Toronto, 1972), 6.

³ See the first chapter of Gerhard May, *Creatio Ex Nihilo*, trans A.S. Worrall (Edinburgh, 1994).

⁴ CPW 6.304. In this study, I assume everywhere that Milton is the author of *De Doctrina*. This view was uncontroversial until the early 1990s, when William B. Hunter began to question the provenance of the treatise. His views are summarized in *Visitation Unimplor’d* (Pittsburgh, 1998). For a devastating reply, see Christopher Hill, ‘William B. Hunter, Bishop Burgess and John Milton,’ *SEL* 34 (1994), 165-93. Gordon Campbell et al. reaffirm the attribution of the work to Milton in ‘The Provenance of *De Doctrina Christiana*,’ *MQ* 31 (1997), 67-117.

into the derivation of matter is not well grounded in Scriptural evidence, either. In *De Doctrina*, the clearest support for the *ex Deo* position Milton endorses comes from one of the apocryphal books, in which God is described creating the world ‘out of a formless matter’ (Wisdom of Solomon 11:17). The verse is so vague that nearly any theory of creation is amenable to it. The Apocrypha, meanwhile, provide evidence just as readily for other views. When Origen wants biblical confirmation of creation *ex nihilo*, he turns to 2 Maccabees: ‘look upon the heaven and earth . . . and consider that God made them of things that were not.’⁵

The long history of scholastic interest in the metaphysics of creation is of no use to Milton. His famously heterodox work on the Christian doctrine starts out with an Arminian proposition: ‘God has revealed the way of eternal salvation only to the individual faith of each man, and demands of us that any man who wishes to be saved should work out his beliefs for himself.’ The only authority he will accept as an external guide in this project is ‘God’s self revelation.’ ‘Accordingly,’ Milton writes, ‘I read and pondered the Holy Scriptures themselves with all possible diligence’ (CPW 6.118). He is drawn, nonetheless, to questions of origin that belong to the tradition of Plato and Aristotle. These difficulties are unfamiliar to the Bible, where even the concept of matter is not well-developed. ‘Quo id auctore dicimus, quod Deus non dicit?’ Milton asks at one point in *De Doctrina* — ‘by what authority do we say, what God does not say?’⁶ Three ways forward, at least, are available to him. One is the lowly wisdom demanded by Raphael in Book 8 of *Paradise Lost*, but evident only intermittently in Milton’s prose. (At one point in the commonplace book, he paraphrases, approvingly, the opinion of several ancient writers that ‘the profound questions concerning God should either not be thought about or should be suppressed in silence lest they be proclaimed to the people’

⁵ 2 Maccabees 4:7. See *The Writings of Origen*, trans. Frederick Crombie, in the *Anti-Nicene Christian Library* (Edinburgh, 1869), Vol. 10, Part 1, 77.

⁶ Milton is discussing divine accommodation to human sensibility, so John Carey, in the CPW, translates the sentence abstractly: ‘on what authority do we contradict God?’ (6.136). I borrow the more literal rendition from Neil D. Graves, ‘Milton and the Theory of Accommodation,’ *SP* 98 (2001), 259.

[CPW 1.380-81]. Yet he sticks to this mandate himself only in exceptional circumstances.) Another possibility is the sort of inventiveness practised by the rabbinic commentators, for whom the lacunae in the Bible offer opportunities for hermeneutic creativity. A third option for Milton is to address such questions by analogy to parts of Scripture where meaning is more certain — where the Bible's strictness, in other words, can be made to bear upon the issues at hand. We shall see that he prefers the last strategy, but the view of creation that results is precarious. Its construction is constantly put under strain by the imagination of a poet who is drawn, whenever possible, to the most difficult case, and as a result frequently leaves the impression that he has put his foot in his mouth.

Before we consider how Milton accounts for the origin of matter, it will be helpful to place his argument within the broader intellectual context he eschews. Let us turn, once more, to the noisy scene with which this chapter began. The waves of chaos crash against Heaven's bounds; the Son first commands calm. Milton, we ought to notice, has made sense of a longstanding confusion about Genesis 1:1. Readers have often wondered whether the Bible's opening verse summarizes or actually precedes the rest of the chapter. Did God 'create the heaven and the earth' and *then* command light into existence, or is Genesis 1:1 more like a topic sentence — a heading that refers to the whole process that follows? The difference becomes meaningful when one tries to understand the remainder of the story. If Genesis 1:1 describes a distinct divine undertaking, it suggests a creation with several stages, the world made 'without form and void' and then shaped into soil and sea. If, instead, the Bible's opening verse sets out the subject for the entire chapter, the real action begins with the Spirit of God brooding over the disorganized stuff of Genesis 1:2.⁷ We may suppose that this material existed beforehand. Milton, typically, manages to have it both ways. In his account, the creation of the world becomes an act of differentiation. 'Thus far extend, thus far thy bounds, / This be thy just circumference,' the Son commands in Book 7 of *Paradise*

⁷ 'And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep.'

Lost. ‘Thus God the heaven created, thus the earth, / Matter unformed and void’ (230-33). The poet is able to read the opening verses of Genesis as a sequence, so that God really does create heaven and earth before He settles upon the face of the waters and says ‘let there be light.’ At the same time, Milton can claim that matter existed prior to creation. Chaos, in his account, warred long before the world was formed; Genesis 1:1 describes the process of organising part of it.

Milton’s description of creation is familiar to readers of Plato’s *Timaeus*. In that work, as in *Paradise Lost*, the world begins with the imposition of order. Creation, for Plato, involves fashioning a preexisting matter ‘to be as perfect and excellent as possible.’⁸ Beforehand, Timaeus says, elemental particles hurtled through the space he calls ‘the receptacle [ὑποδοχή] of all becoming’ (*T* 49a), fierce with the agitations of density:

As they are moved, they [the elements] drift continually, some in one direction and others in others, separating from one another. They are winnowed out, as it were, like grain that is sifted by winnowing sieves or other such implements. They are carried off and settle down, the dense and heavy ones in one direction, and the rare and light ones to another place . . . Finding them in this natural condition, the first thing the god then did was to give them their distinctive shapes, using forms and numbers. (*T* 52e-53c)

The god (θεός) of whom Plato is thinking in the final sentence is not, of course, the omnipotent ‘I am’ of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Yet the situation the Demiurge surveys before creation is similar enough to what we find in *Paradise Lost* for it to seem likely Milton had it in mind. The resemblances between the accounts, A.B. Chambers observed long ago, are ‘numerous and close.’⁹ The messy reservoir upon which the Demiurge enforces order, for instance, is the ‘wetnurse’ (τιθήνην) of generation; the ‘wild abyss’ that stamps beyond Heaven’s shores in *Paradise Lost* is the ‘womb of

⁸ *Timaeus* 53c. References throughout are to Donald Zeyl’s translation (Indianapolis, 2001). Hereafter they appear parenthetically and are identified by *T*.

⁹ A.B. Chambers, ‘Chaos in *Paradise Lost*,’ *JHI* 24 (1963), 64. Milton’s debts to Hesiod, Ovid and Democritus, among others, are documented here in detail.

nature.’¹⁰ The primitive elements Plato describes are teeming with the qualities that the Creator will eventually assign them. ‘Dense and heavy’ particles move one way, ‘rare and light ones’ in another, as the repository of matter ‘turns watery and fiery and receives the character of earth and air’ (*T* 52d-53a). Milton’s chaos, likewise, is a battleground of ‘Hot, Cold, Moist, and Dry, four champions fierce,’ where ‘embryon atoms’ are arranged ‘in their several clans, / Light-armed or heavy, sharp, smooth, swift or slow’ (2.898-902).

The broad affinities between Plato’s description of creation and the Genesis narrative gave Saint Augustine cause to wonder whether the Greek philosopher had a secret knowledge of the Bible.¹¹ The story of creation in the *Timaeus* differs from Milton’s, however — and that of nearly all Christians — since it describes the existence of substance in the universe that is independent of God. The ‘wetnurse of generation’ that tosses and churns in the *Timaeus* is distinct from its shaper and is quieted only by his superior strength. For a Christian, this is a dualist position, heretical in the most fundamental sense because it denies God’s Oneness and His infinity. It is ‘inconceivable,’ to Milton, ‘that matter should always have existed independently of God,’ since ‘it [matter] is a passive principle, dependent upon God and subservient to him’ (*CPW* 6.307). The account of creation in the *Timaeus* presents a second serious problem. In Plato’s description, the Demiurge seeks to organise what is confused; ‘from a state of disorder,’ Timaeus says, he brought ‘[a state] of order’ (*T* 30a). Yet Timaeus also suggests that there was a little bit of organization in the universe even before the Creator presided over it. Unlike elements were usually far apart, and ‘those most like each other’ were in ‘the same region’ (*T* 53a). For a Christian who is willing to admit the presence of matter before the beginning of Genesis 1:1, even these ‘traces’ of order are problematic, since they detract from God’s providence and goodness. The warring

¹⁰ *PL* 2.911. This description more directly echoes Lucretius, who describes the earth as *omniparens*, the ‘universal parent,’ in *De Rerum Natura* 5.260. Later, we shall examine this reference at some length.

¹¹ See *City of God* 11.21.

atoms of Milton's chaos, Thomas Corns has observed, do not work like monkeys at typewriters. They never produce *anything* serendipitous.¹²

Most early modern thinkers would have begun with the more obvious objection that matter, in the *Timaeus*, exists before the creation of the world. 'Matter could not be before this beginning,' Sir Walter Raleigh insists in his *History of the World*, 'except we faine a double creation, or allow of two powers, and both infinite, the possibility whereof scorneth defence.'¹³ Donne makes a similar observation in one of his sermons, when he argues that 'there was no pre-existent matter in the world, when God made the world,' just as 'there is no pre-existent merit in man, when God makes him his.'¹⁴ Both writers encourage instead the belief in a creation *ex nihilo*, a view that has its roots in the early days of the Church and remains orthodox today.¹⁵ This position, taken to avoid the dualist, even Manichaeian implications of the classical myths of origin, finds particularly strong expression in Augustine's *Confessions*. Although the argument of the work is familiar, I want to review it quickly.

When he reads the opening chapter of Genesis, Augustine discovers two distinct stages of creation. First, the formless stuff of Genesis 1:2 was made 'out of nothing' (C 12.28), and then God added shape and order. The second step, Augustine is careful to note, was not at all like the work of a craftsman. God did not survey the material at hand and impose the form imagined by His inner eye. To think of creation in this way is to fall into the miscalculations of human sensibility:

¹² Thomas Corns, *Regaining 'Paradise Lost'* (London, 1994), 100. The comparison is particularly apt with Plato's chaos in mind; in *Timaeus* 48b, he likens the elements to the "letters" of the universe.'

¹³ Sir Walter Raleigh, *The History of the World*, ed. C.A. Patrides (London, 1976), 88-89.

¹⁴ John Donne, *The Complete Sermons*, ed. George Potter and Evelyn Simpson (Berkeley, 1953-62), Vol. 5, 316.

¹⁵ J.H. Adamson has handsomely described 'an ancient and honourable Christian tradition' of support for various forms of creation *ex Deo*. See 'Milton and the Creation,' *JEGP* 56 (1962), 756. The *ex nihilo* position remained dominant, however, and was surely the orthodox view, during the long interval Adamson discusses.

The way, God, in which you made heaven and earth was not that you made them either in heaven or earth. Nor was it in air or water, for these belong to heaven and earth. Nor did you make the universe within the framework of the universe. There was nowhere for it to be made before it was brought into existence. Nor did you have any tool in your hand to make heaven and earth. How could you obtain anything you had not made as a tool for making something? . . . Therefore you spoke and they were made, and by your word you made them. (C 11.5)

God, on this account, is not a supreme sculptor who cuts beautiful shapes from massy blocks. The material He turns into the world is a substance whose formlessness is beyond the reach of human conjecture. Augustine calls it a ‘nothing-something,’ outside time: ‘I use the word formless not for that which lacked form,’ he writes, ‘but for that which had a form such that, if it had appeared, my mind would have experienced revulsion from its extraordinary and bizarre shape’ (C 12.6). We may find it easier, Augustine tells us, to think of what stands between form and nothingness as itself nonexistent.

We may wonder why Augustine insists upon the origin of matter in nothing, an idea that twists the mind and stands unsupported by reason. Why does he not reinterpret his proof-text, Romans 11:36, ‘of him, through him, and to him, are all things,’ and argue that the world was created ‘of God’? It is a potential reading Augustine denies explicitly. ‘You did not make creation out of yourself in your own likeness’ (C 12.28). The danger in this view, Augustine knows, is that it threatens the uniqueness of God’s Son, to whom heaven and earth created *ex Deo* ‘would be equal’ (C 12.7). The *ex nihilo* position offers a second significant advantage as well. It allows Augustine to describe evil in negative terms, as a falling away from goodness, a privation of the divine. The descent from light into the brambles of sin becomes a loss of being, a plunge towards the nothingness of origin. ‘The only thing that is not from you is what has no existence,’ Augustine writes in the *Confessions*. ‘The movement of the will away from you, who are, is a movement toward that which has less being’ (C 12.11).

Sir Walter Raleigh, I have already mentioned, adopts Augustine’s view of creation in his *History of the World*. ‘Matter thou madest of nothing, and being made, it was

little more than nothing,' he writes, citing 'St *Augustine* and *Isidore*' as authorities.¹⁶

Walter Charleton, an early Cartesian, suggests at one point that we suppose 'that God in the first act of his Wisdome and Power, out of the *Tohu*, or nothing,' created a 'mass of Atoms, as was necessary to the constitution of the Universe.' He rejects the proposition that this chaos was ancient, or fashioned other than *ex nihilo*.¹⁷ It is true that objections to this view grew more common as the seventeenth century went on. Orthodox believers, however, continued to accept that the world had been formed out of nothingness — that entity had been created from a state of nonentity.

By the end of Book 2 of *Paradise Lost*, the reader feels how sharply Milton has departed from this tradition. His divergence is difficult to ignore. The 'wasteful deep' (2.961) between Heaven and Hell, the material battleground ruled by the hoary Anarch, appears in the poem again and again. Of the first ten books of *Paradise Lost*, only Books 4 and 9 fail to refer to chaos directly,¹⁸ and its presence in the poem's background is strongly felt. Chaos, we find, existed before the world's beginning, and it remains even after God has declared His creation very good. 'Furious winds / And surging waves' (7.214-15) precede the account of creation; after the Fall, the reader returns again to the 'wide anarchy of chaos damp and dark' (10.283). The poem occasionally hints at an explanation. 'I am who fill / Infinitude' (7.168-69), God tells the Son, for instance, while Raphael speaks of 'one first matter all' (5.472). Before turning to *Paradise Lost*, however, we need to look more closely at Milton's treatment of creation in *De Doctrina*. Afterwards, we will be able to see how the theological and poetic arguments correspond, and whether the porous language of Milton's verse sustains the distinctions set up in the Christian treatise.

¹⁶ Raleigh, *History*, ed. Patrides (1976), 89.

¹⁷ Walter Charleton, *The darknes of atheism dispelled by the light of nature* (London, 1652), 43, 47. Quoted in Dennis Danielson, *Milton's Good God* (Cambridge, 1982), 34.

¹⁸ I repeat Robert M. Adams's observation in 'A Little Look into Chaos,' in *Illustrious Evidence*, ed. Earl Miner (Berkeley, 1975), 76.

II.

The chapter on creation in *De Doctrina* begins with an assertion that instantly distinguishes Milton's position from the orthodox view. The world, he writes, is 'the second kind of external efficiency' (CPW 6.299), not the first. Couched in Aristotelian terminology is Milton's most famous heresy, and his most radical, in the sense of the Latin *radix*, 'root.'¹⁹ I mentioned earlier that Augustine shuns *ex Deo* creation because it endangers the privileged relationship between the Father and the Son. A world formed out of God calls into question the uniqueness of Christ, who, traditionally, shares God's *essentia* (essence) and *substantia* (substance) as part of the Trinity. Milton is all too ready to allow this to happen. Earlier in *De Doctrina*, he urges the reader to cast aside just the view of the Son that Augustine defends, 'sophistical' and contradictory as it is, 'without a scrap of real evidence to support it in Scripture' (CPW 6.206). Many of the arguments against the Trinity appear for a second time in Milton's discussion of creation. The particulars of the position need not concern us here.²⁰ More important, for the present argument, is Milton's contention that the Son exists outside God entirely, as 'the first of created things' (CPW 6.206). He is made of the Father's *substantia*, but does not share His *essentia*, which is not communicable. Think of a line drawn between 'the creator God and the created world,' Michael Bauman suggests. On Milton's view, the Son falls on the side of the creatures. The difference between Redeemer and redeemed is one of degree, not of kind.²¹

With the Son demoted to a lesser position, Milton is free to consider creation *ex Deo*. It is a view he deduces from a thin series of biblical prooftexts. One of these is the

¹⁹ Milton divides the internal efficiency of God ('residing in his decrees') from His external efficiency ('the execution of these decrees') in *DDC* 1.5. The difference is that God, in the latter category, is the efficient cause of something *outside* Himself. For a description of Aristotle's four causes, on which Milton is relying, see *Physics* 2.3. The first kind of external efficiency is 'generation,' by which 'God begot his only Son'; the second is 'creation'; then, 'the government of the universe' (CPW 6.205).

²⁰ Michael Bauman discusses Milton's view of the Trinity thoroughly in *Milton's Arianism* (Frankfurt am Main, 1987).

²¹ Bauman, *Milton's Arianism* (1987), 41, 45.

opening verse of Genesis, in which the verb *bara* ('create') is taken to mean 'make out of something.' The first three words of the Bible, *bereshit bara elohim* ('in the beginning God created'), Milton says, disallow creation *ex nihilo* immediately. As far as the Hebrew language is concerned, he is probably correct, although the claim is hardly self-evident. (Maimonides, with whom one suspects even Milton would have hesitated to disagree, comes to exactly the opposite conclusion in *The Guide for the Perplexed*: 'in reference to the Universe . . . Scripture employs the verb *bara*, which we explain as denoting he produced something from nothing.'²²) The Scriptural support that follows this initial contention is not encouraging. One argument Milton makes is that the darkness before creation must have been a substantial darkness, 'far from a mere nothing' (*CPW* 6.306). If darkness signifies a state of nothingness, he asks, how can God 'create the darkness' in Isaiah 45:7 — surely He cannot create nothing! (The poet fails to mention that Isaiah is referring to God's power to create evil.) What distinguishes the position set out in *De Doctrina*, at bottom, is Milton's certainty that none of the traditional options makes any sense. The eternal, independent matter of the *Timaeus* is 'inconceivable,' since it runs afoul of ideas about God's infinity and singularity. Milton suspects the *ex nihilo* position of the same flaw. Augustine, he sees, comes close to the dualist error when he claims that matter comes from nothing, not from God. 'I do not see how God can truthfully be called infinite if there is something that might be added to him,' he writes in *De Doctrina*. 'If something did exist . . . which had not first been from God and in God, then that might be added to him' (*CPW* 6.310). An argument derived from Aristotelian metaphysics supplies the formal rejection of the *ex nihilo* view. The 'material cause' of the world 'must either be God or nothing.' But 'nothing is no cause at all.' There 'remains only this solution': 'all things come from God' (*CPW* 6.308).

The thought of a creation in which God shares Himself is appealing to Milton. It strikes him as a majestic act of generosity for God to allow His virtue to take on degrees,

²² Moses Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, trans. M. Friedländer (London, 1904), 218.

to become ‘susceptible to augmentation and remission.’²³ Milton is less clear about the details of this extraordinary act. Critics of the *ex Deo* position, he knows, will object that ‘body cannot emanate from spirit.’ To this charge, he takes a defensive stance: ‘much less can it [body] emanate from nothing.’ The poet is convinced, moreover, that ‘a bodily force’ may come from a ‘spiritual substance’ (*CPW* 6.309). Is it less strange, he asks, that we trust in ‘something spiritual’ to rise from our bodies at resurrection?

A great deal of scholarly interest has focused on the implications of this view for Milton’s God. At stake is whether the ‘corporeal faculty’ present within a Father who creates *ex Deo* implies that He is, in some respect, a material being.²⁴ Resolutions to this problem necessarily hang on a few words bent in one direction or another, and I have little to add to the balance, except to sound a note of concern at studies that take God’s materialism as a foundation for larger claims about *Paradise Lost*.²⁵ Massive philosophical difficulties attend whatever resolution we choose, and Milton leaves these largely untouched. If God is not material, then the material substance of the world is governed, ultimately, by an immaterial being. We are headed towards the problem Gilbert Ryle described, pejoratively, as ‘the ghost in the machine.’²⁶ If God does have a material element, then He is both material and immaterial. This conclusion challenges the

²³ *CPW* 6.308. This notion, and the discussion that surrounds it in *De Doctrina*, have roots in Plato’s argument concerning divine envy in *Timaeus* 29-30. The most supple account of the tradition is still Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being* (Cambridge, MA, 1936), esp. Chs. 2, 3 and 5. Chapter 5 of the present study considers some of these ideas.

²⁴ The most sensible analysis of this question is still John Reesing, ‘The Materiality of God in Milton’s *De Doctrina Christiana*,’ *Harvard Theological Review* 50 (1957), 159-73. Reesing concludes that Milton is a materialist whose ‘position is not so much theologically heretical as logically contradictory and philosophically inadequate’ (172). Other well-known attempts to address the problem include Denis Saurat, *Milton: Man and Thinker* (New York, 1925), and Walter Clyde Curry, *Milton’s Ontology, Cosmogony, and Physics* (Lexington, 1957), 34 ff. A more complete list appears in Juliet L. Cummins, ‘Milton’s Gods and the Matter of Creation,’ *MS* 40 (2001), 101-2 n. 5-10, although this essay, worryingly, takes divine materialism as a point to be determined by critical consensus.

²⁵ Examples include John Rumrich, *Milton Unbound* (Cambridge, 1996), 118-46, and Mary F. Norton, for whom Milton’s God becomes ‘the ultimate fractal configuration,’ in “‘The Rising World of Waters Dark and Deep’: Chaos Theory and *Paradise Lost*,’ in *Arenas of Conflict*, ed. Kristin McColgan et al. (Selinsgrove, PA, 1997), 148.

²⁶ Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (London, 1949), 17.

simplicity of the divine *essentia*, a postulate at the heart of Milton's argument against the Trinity. Suppose we retreat, and conclude that 'God, as he really is, is far beyond man's imagination, let alone his understanding' (CPW 6.133). Here, too, however, the theology is deeply divided.²⁷

Milton does make one feature of creation *ex Deo* very clear. He is careful to insist that the original matter of the cosmos was in no way imperfect. It 'came from God in an incorruptible state,' he writes, and 'since the fall is still incorruptible, so far as its essence is concerned':

Neque enim materia illa res mala est, aut vilis existimanda, sed bona, omnisque boni postmodum producendi seminarium: Substantia erat, nec aliunde quam ex fonte omnis substantiae derivanda, indigesta modo et incomposita, quam Deus postea digressit et ornavit. (Col. 15.22)

For this original matter was not an evil thing, nor to be thought of as worthless: it was good, and contained the seeds [*seminarium*, lit. 'was the nursery'] of all subsequent good. It was a substance, and could only have been derived from the source of all substance. It was in a confused and disordered state at first, but afterwards God made it ordered and beautiful. (CPW 6.308)

Milton calls attention to this point for two reasons. The first is that his *ex Deo* view does away with cosmological solutions to the problem of evil. In the *Timaeus*, Plato describes a recalcitrance in the independent, pre-existing matter of the 'receptacle.' 'The god,' he writes, 'fashioned these four kinds [the elements] to be as perfect and excellent as possible, when they were not so before' (T 53c). The dualism implicit in his account of creation offers Plato at least a weak account of evil as the condition of the universe where it is 'god-forsaken' (T 53b). Augustine, we have seen, traces a precise relationship between sin and the origin of matter *ex nihilo*. Milton's description of an infinite, perfect God creating the world out of Himself disallows both arguments. The hint of a malignance natural to the universe, therefore, is far more damaging to his theology. Evil in matter *ex Deo* will suggest the presence of evil in God.

It must also be the case, however, that any world created by God will be less good than He. Augustine presents a version of this argument in *De diversis*

²⁷ Graves, 'Milton and the Theory of Accommodation' (2001), registers many of the complexities of this view.

quaestionibus. ‘Non essent omnia, si essent aequalia,’ he reminds us: ‘if everything were equal, there would not be everything.’²⁸ Since God is perfectly good, anything that can be differentiated from Him is, by definition, not as good as He is. For the creation of a universe beyond God to be possible, God must withhold some of His goodness from it. ‘The things which [God] has made are all good,’ Augustine writes elsewhere, but ‘they are not as good as He who made them’ — ‘quamvis non sint tam bona quam est ille ipse qui fecit.’²⁹ I mentioned earlier that a virtue capable of ‘various degrees’ and ‘susceptible to augmentation and remission’ is, for Milton, a demonstration of the Creator’s ‘supreme power and supreme goodness’ (*CPW* 6.308). The insistence in *De Doctrina* that ‘original matter was not an evil thing’ sets a firm lower boundary to this diminution. No substance, Milton has to argue, emerged from God totally without His goodness. What this means is that the poet cannot accept the profoundly negative attitude taken towards matter by a writer like Lancelot Andrewes, for whom ‘many things’ in the world have ‘no essential goodness in them,’ and ‘all things created’ harbour some ‘ill and vicious quality,’ to ‘bewray the imperfection and rudeness’ of the material ‘of which they came.’³⁰ Such a view will come too close to impugning the benevolence and perfection of the source of matter Himself.

In the next section, I want to consider the possibility that the messy cosmos of *Paradise Lost* does just this. One peculiar aspect of the poem’s creation is that primitive, unformed stuff remains afterwards. The Son leaves behind a sea of matter to roar beyond the new world’s bounds; ‘indignant waves’ (10.311) persist. A.B. Chambers

²⁸ *De diversis quaestionibus* XLI, in the *Patrologia Cursus Completus. Series Latina*, ed. J.-P. Migne (Paris, 1844-55), Vol. 40, Col. 27. Hereafter *PCC*. Augustine is considering a related problem: ‘cum omnia Deus fecerit, quare non aequalia fecerit’—‘since God has made everything, why did He not make everything equal?’

²⁹ In *De moribus ecclesiae catholicae et de moribus Manichaeorum*, Book 2, Ch. 4. In *PCC* Vol. 32, Col. 1347.

³⁰ See *Apospasmata Sacra* (London, 1657), 27, 12.

writes of Milton as the first writer to maintain such a view.³¹ Even Plato, in the *Timaeus*, takes pains to insist that ‘each one of the four constituents was entirely used up in the process of building the world. The builder . . . left no part or power of any of them out’ (*T* 32d). Nearly thirty years ago, Robert M. Adams began an essay on *Paradise Lost* by noting how little attention had been given to this feature of the epic. ‘It would have been nice to find other people’s definitions, descriptions, and doctrines of Milton’s chaos,’ Adams wrote, but he had been ‘unable to find more than passing remarks on the subject.’³² It is no longer necessary to begin with a lament. In the past two decades, scholarly interest in chaos has proliferated. The most recent popular edition of *Paradise Lost* devotes several pages to the sources and ontology of Milton’s abyss.³³ Studies now enlist advanced perspectives in semiotics and mythography to describe it.³⁴ At least one critic has looked for parallels with modern chaos theory.³⁵ Chaos in *Paradise Lost* has proved a source of evidence about Milton’s idea of gender.³⁶ It has been examined for his perspective on seventeenth-century science and natural philosophy.³⁷ For David Norbrook, the relevant point of reference is early modern

³¹ Chambers, ‘Chaos in *Paradise Lost*’ (1963), 83. Masson lavishes similar attention on Milton’s ‘infinite globe of circumambient blackness or darkness,’ in a ‘cosmical epic which was without precedent and remains without a parallel’ (*Life* [1880], Vol. 6, 535). Lucretius pictures the cosmos in similar terms, of course, but he does not believe in creation: the universe of *De Rerum Natura* has always existed, and the emergence of the world is the result of an eternity of random collisions and combinations of atoms. The deep affinities between this account and Milton’s are set out in a thoughtful article by John Leonard: ‘Milton, Lucretius, and “the Void Profound of Unessential Night,”’ in *Living Texts*, ed. Kristin A. Pruitt (Selinsgrove, PA, 2000), 198-217.

³² Adams, ‘A Little Look into Chaos’ (1975), 71.

³³ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. John Leonard (London, 2001), xvi-xxi.

³⁴ For examples, see Catherine Gimelli Martin, ‘“Pregnant Causes Mixt”: The Wages of Sin and the Laws of Entropy in Milton’s Chaos,’ in *Arenas of Conflict*, ed. McColgan et al. (1997), 161-82, and Regina Schwartz, *Remembering and Repeating* (Cambridge, 1988), esp. 8-39.

³⁵ See Norton, ‘Chaos Theory and *Paradise Lost*’ (1997), 140-60.

³⁶ Rumrich, *Milton Unbound* (1996), 118-46.

³⁷ Harinder Singh Marjara, *Contemplation of Created Things* (Toronto, 1992), 89-107, as well as Curry, *Milton’s Ontology* (1957), 74-91, and Stephen Fallon, *Milton among the Philosophers* (Ithaca, NY, 1991), 191.

republicanism.³⁸ William B. Hunter cites the idiosyncrasies of Milton's chaos to question the authorship of *De Doctrina*.³⁹ Other scholars have used it to discover views about divine freedom.⁴⁰ Almost all of these studies reach a conclusion about the moral nature of the deep, and I am aware that the position I defend in the following pages has become deeply unpopular. I find it unavoidable. The scent of Hell hangs over the vast abyss of *Paradise Lost*, I want to argue, and Milton's chaos poses a serious challenge to the careful view of creation the poet has worked out.

III.

'To themselves I left them,' God tells the Son in Book 6 of *Paradise Lost*. They sit in His sanctuary, far from the clang of angel against angel doing battle. The rebel forces have not yet felt the wobblings of sin, and the fight is evenly matched. Before them is a grim prospect, God says, of blows uninterrupted and the heavy fall of hills, unless the Son intervenes:

Whence in perpetual fight they needs must last
 Endless, and no solution be found:
 War wearied hath performed what war can do,
 And to disordered rage let loose the reins,
 With mountains as with weapons armed, which makes
 Wild work in heav'n, and dangerous to the main. (6.693-698)

The situation God describes bears more than a passing resemblance to the scene in Book 7 with which this chapter began. Outside the bright shores on which the Son stands before creation, there lies a vast expanse of 'eternal anarchy' that sounds with 'the noise / Of endless wars' (2.896-97). This battleground of elements also rattles with the clamour of Bellona, a mutinous rally 'no less than if this frame / Of heaven were falling' (2.924-25). The waves of chaos break against the divine boundaries 'as mountains to

³⁸ David Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic* (Cambridge, 2001), 489 ff.

³⁹ William B. Hunter, 'The Confounded Confusion of Chaos,' in *Living Texts*, ed. Pruitt (2000), 228-36.

⁴⁰ Among others, Rumrich, *Milton Unbound* (1996); Martin, 'The Wages of Sin' (1997); and Danielson, *Milton's Good God* (1982), 1-57.

assault / Heaven's height' (7.214-15). An end to original discord is unlikely, too, without the imposition of a higher hand. Otherwise, 'all these in their pregnant causes . . . thus must ever fight' (2.913-14).

These similarities, on their own, are not alarming. Milton is unusual in making the comparison between chaos and war mutually sustaining: each one, in *Paradise Lost*, is a feature of the other. But the analogies he makes reflexive (elemental chaos is like human warfare, human warfare is like elemental chaos) are well represented in classical literature. At the beginning of the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid imagines the universe's undigested matter engaged in battle. His description of the elements — 'frigida pugnabant calidis, umentia siccis,' 'cold fought with hot, wet with dry' — supplies the immediate source for Milton's 'Hot, Cold, Moist, and Dry,' those 'four champions fierce' that 'strive here [in chaos] for mastery' (2.898-99). The comparison moves more often in the other direction, so that chaos and disorder become characteristics of battle. In the *Iliad*, the troops of Agamemnon surge as the waves of the Icarian sea (2.142-46); the Trojan assault against the Ajaxes in Book 5 is like a dreadful storm, black as pitch and with a mighty whirlwind (519-32). When Milton stages a battle conspicuously modelled after those of his epic precursors, it is not surprising that the account includes the rage of madding wheels, with 'horrid confusion heaped / Upon horrid confusion' (6.668-69), '[as] if nature's concord broke' (6.310). Nor, indeed, must the embryon factions and sounds of siege give immediate worry to the reader who travels with Satan through the chaotic abyss. The 'corny reed,' after all, stands 'embattled' (7.320) in Eden, without any hint of mischief.

When we look more closely at the war in Heaven and the chaos outside Heaven's bounds, however, the kinship that emerges has an unexpected strength. Consider, once more, the command that quiets the elemental surge in Book 7. I noted earlier that Milton displaces the imperative expected of his creation narrative. The Son begins not with 'let there be light' but instead with a demand for calm: 'Silence ye troubled waves, and thou, deep, peace / Your discord end' (216-17). On the field of battle in Book 6, observing

another scene of noisy tumult, the Son issues a similar order:

Stand still in bright array ye saints, here stand
Ye angels armed, this day from battle rest. (6.801-02)

The chiasmic pause brokered by ‘deep, peace’ finds its complement here in an enjambed line (‘here stand / Ye angels armed’) reminiscent of the opening verses of ‘Lycidas.’

What follows, in both cases, is an act of expulsion. In Book 6, the unmixing is dramatic and expected. God has told the Son to ‘drive [the rebels] out / From all heaven’s bounds into the utter deep’ (6.715-16), although, perversely, the devils choose freely even in this and throw themselves into the dark abyss. Later, Belial reports that Heaven will forever refuse their taint, opposed now to sin like oil to water. Should the fallen band ever attempt again to capture God’s throne, His

ethereal mould
Incapable of stain would soon expel
Her mischief, and purge off the baser fire
Victorious. (2.140-42)

After the Son’s demand for silence in Book 7, likewise, it becomes necessary to purify chaos before creation can begin. ‘On the watery calm,’ Raphael reports to Adam,

His brooding wings the spirit of God outspread,
And vital virtue infused, and vital warmth
Throughout the fluid mass, but downward purged
The black tartareous cold infernal dregs
Adverse to life. (7.234-39)

The last two lines have troubled critics of *Paradise Lost*. There is some precedent for them in Lucretius, whose explanation of the world’s emergence in *De Rerum Natura* also involves the settling of a concomitant debris. As the earth condensed, hemmed in by salty oceans, all of its ‘sludge,’ Lucretius writes, ‘sank down to the bottom and settled there like dregs.’⁴¹ This description, however, does not anticipate the bristling effect of ‘infernal’ or ‘tartareous.’ Such attributes carry little weight in the cosmos Lucretius describes, a lonely flux of atoms, without end in space or time. It is not surprising,

⁴¹ Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura* 5.496-97: ‘atque omnis mundi quasi limus in imum / Confluxit gravis et subsedit funditus ut faex.’ The text, and all other Latin citations, are from the edition of Cyril Bailey (Oxford, 1947), while all translations are Martin Ferguson Smith’s, in *On the Nature of Things* (Indianapolis, 2001). Subsequent references, both Latin and English, appear within the text and are identified by *DRN*.

either, that the earlier poet should allow to elemental matter the imperfection implied by ‘sludge.’ As evidence for his conclusion that the world was created by the chance movement of atoms, Lucretius cites its ‘serious flaws,’ like huge swathes of land covered with briars and rocks. How could the gods, he wonders, have prepared such a place for us? Readers of *Paradise Lost* will want to ask a similar question of Milton’s God. If ‘original matter was not an evil thing,’ how is it possible that the territory bounded by the Son’s compass contains ‘infernal dregs’? Why, indeed, would any material ‘adverse to life’ have come from a Being whom the Psalmist calls the *m’kor chayim*, ‘the fountain of life’ (Psalm 36:9)?

By now, it ought to be clear that the parallel we have been examining functions quite differently from, say, the blueprint shared by the council settings in Books 2 and 3. There, the pairing of the scenes adds to the precision with which the reader is able to separate them. The twin sequences of discord and purification in the middle of the poem do not, on the other hand, obviously set into relief the differences between the types of enterprise they draw together. The result is closer to what is achieved by the technique Stanley Fish has called ‘a Milton pseudo-simile’: that ‘characteristic manœuvre by which what is offered as an analogy is perceived finally as an identity.’ Fish has in mind those instances in *Paradise Lost* in which the two poles of a comparison come so close that they become practically indistinguishable, or one is swallowed up.⁴² To relate Satan’s troops to pharaoh’s, as Milton does in Book 1, is like asserting that dogs are quadrupeds.⁴³ When we read Books 6 and 7 of *Paradise Lost*, we may feel that the

⁴² Stanley Fish, *Surprised by Sin* (second ed., London, 1997), 310. Such a simile ‘ostensibly compares *A* with *B* . . . but ends up discovering that *B* is a manifestation, in another form, of *A*, or, alternatively, that both are embodiments of a complex entity *C*.’ Isabel MacCaffrey, *Paradise Lost as Myth* (Cambridge, MA, 1959), esp. 133-44, offers a beautiful estimation of the effect.

It is interesting to observe that the synecdotal version of the ‘pseudo-simile’ designates nothing more than what Aristotle identifies as an ordinary simile in the *Rhetoric*. A synecdotal ‘pseudo-metaphor,’ for that matter, would fall under Aristotle’s definition of metaphor. See *Poetics* 1457b and *Rhetoric* 1406b.

⁴³ I do not mean to suggest, as others have, that all of Milton’s similes follow this pattern; the next passage in Book 1 introduces a startling comparison between Satan and Moses. Milton, indeed, is often guided by the dictum he sets for himself in the *Apology against a Pamphlet*: ‘doth not Christ himselfe teache the highest things by the similitude of old bottles and patcht cloaths? Doth he not illustrate best things by most evil?’ (CPW 1.498). The wider claim for the pseudo-simile is made by MacCaffrey,

homologation of war and chaos tends towards the sort of collapsing effect Fish describes.⁴⁴ It may appear to us that the actions of rebel and elemental faction are not merely similar, but rooted in a common purpose; that the Son's refining command, in both cases, involves the defeat of a kind of evil. 'Hell at last / Yawning received them [the devils] whole' (6.874-75), Raphael tells Adam at the denouement of the conflict in Book 6. Milton is thinking back to Isaiah's description of the mouth of Hell, opened 'without measure' (5:14), but it is worth remembering all the same that the word 'chaos' is derived from the Greek *χάσκειν*, 'to yawn.' The burning lake upon which we discover the fallen angels in Book 1, after all, is 'in a place of utter darkness, fitliest called chaos' (Proem).

The difficulty becomes more apparent as we turn back to the second book of the poem. Let us begin early on, with Mammon's address to the infernal council, which follows Belial's plea for patience and mainly reinforces it. The devil starts off, however, with a moment of surmise, a false flutter, as he considers the options available to the fallen band. Here is his appraisal of the success still possible for them:

Either to disenthroned the king of heaven
 We war, if war be best, or to regain
 Our own right lost: him to unthroned we then
 May hope, when everlasting fate shall yield
 To fickle chance, and Chaos judge the strife. (2.229-33)

To glimpse a universe in which accident triumphs over destiny, as Mammon does, is a common pastime for a devil. 'In spite of fate . . . we may chance / Reenter heaven' (393, 396-97), Satan proclaims once a plan has been agreed upon in Book 2. Sin and Death feed on the tender fruits of Paradise in Book 10 and 'laugh, as if . . . [God] to them had quitted all, / At random yielded up to their misrule' (626-28). Beelzebub

'Paradise Lost' as 'Myth' (1959): 'Milton's worlds all fit exactly inside each other; in noting their points of similarity, he is not so much joining different objects as observing the same thing on a smaller or larger scale' (142).

⁴⁴ I use the term 'homologation' in the sense James Whaler introduced many years ago in 'The Miltonic Simile,' *PMLA* 46 (1931), 1034-74. A.D. Nuttall, in *The Alternative Trinity* (Oxford, 1998), follows Whaler in associating the homologated simile with Virgil. It is 'the kind of simile that turns out to be multiply relevant to the person or thing described, to act as a kind of mirror' (73).

glances at the possibility sideways in Book 1, when he supposes that the war in Heaven ‘put to proof [God’s] high supremacy, / Whether upheld by strength, or chance, or fate’ (132-33). Mammon is more sensible than this. He quickly acknowledges the flimsiness of his vision. To topple the Creator, he knows, would require ‘force impossible’; besides, a future in Hell cannot be too bad. Even in Heaven, God sometimes chooses ‘amidst / Thick clouds and dark . . . to reside,’ thundering from beneath His blanket of shade. ‘As he our darkness,’ Mammon asks, ‘cannot we his light / Imitate when we please?’ (2.263-64, 269-70).

The second surmise is more promising than the first. The thought of working at a nether empire modelled after Heaven brings the devils a moment of relief. Yet even the metaphor Milton uses to describe this brief passage of calm gestures towards another realm whose mode of opposition the council has not yet considered. After Mammon finishes his address, the din of the infernal assembly is like the memory of ‘blustering winds,’ retained in rocks after a storm; now, the ‘hoarse cadence’ that lulls a sailor as he reaches harbour after a stormy night at sea. No Norway foam, not here, but peril is close by. It is no surprise when Beelzebub proposes a labour of discord, and the infernal bluster commences once more. Let us find the new world, he says, and ‘drive as we were driven’; let us ‘interrupt [God’s] joy in our confusion, and our joy upraise / In his disturbance’ (2.366, 371-72). If Moloch’s desire to see God’s throne ‘mixed with Tartarean sulphur, and strange fire’ is beyond their reach, ‘earth with hell’ instead they may ‘mingle and involve’ (2.69, 383-84). These ideas of disorder, of flames laying waste to creation, lie very near Mammon’s early wish that Chaos might referee a victory against the Father.

Infernal success later in the poem arrives in precisely the shape the devils imagine. Soon after Adam and Eve have eaten from the Tree in Book 9, they pant with confusion for the first time:

high winds worse within
 Began to rise, high passions, anger, hate,
 Mistrust, suspicion, discord, and shook sore

Their inward state of mind, calm region once
And full of peace, now tossed and turbulent. (9.1122-26)

In the fallen world, Milton writes in *Tetrachordon*, it is difficult ‘to limit sinne, to put a girdle about that Chaos.’ Sin is ‘alwaies an excesse,’ always ‘as boundlesse as that vacuity beyond the world’ (CPW 2.657-58). The Richardsons observe that Adam and Eve’s inner tumult is an ‘Intellectual Chaos’ that awaits ‘the Omnific Word’ to ‘Pronounce Silence ye troubl’d Waves.’⁴⁵ By the end of Book 10, there is no prospect of relief. The ‘troubl’d Waves’ persist; we find Adam ‘troubled in a sea of passion tossed’ (10.718). The turbulence of sin begins to spill into the outside world. The stars learn an ‘influence malignant,’ to ‘prove tempestuous’ (10.662-64); the sun alters his course and produces ‘cold and heat / Scarce tolerable’ (10.653-54). The winds on earth, meanwhile, are taught to imitate the ‘high winds worse within’ that afflict Adam and Eve. ‘With bluster’ they are able now ‘to confound / Sea, earth, and shore,’ while

armed with ice
And snow and hail and stormy gust and flaw,
Boreas and Caecias and Argestes loud
And Thrascias rend the woods and seas upturn;
With adverse blast upturns them from the south
Notus and Afer black with thundrous clouds
From Serralonia. (10.665-66, 697-703)

The confusion is not yet complete. It remains for Discord, ‘daughter of sin,’ to introduce conflict among the lower creatures. Gambolling turns to devouring: ‘Beast . . . with beast gan war, and fowl with fowl, / And fish with fish’ (10.709-12).

The clearest suggestion of the relationship between chaos and infernal enterprise comes at the end of Book 2, when Satan wings through the abyss on his way to the new world. His is a voyage with ‘hazard huge,’ he tells the devilish council beforehand; time and direction fall away in the ‘abortive gulf,’ which threatens the wayfarer ‘with utter loss of being’ (2.440-41). The Fiend flies amid ‘stunning sounds,’ past ravaging elements beyond number. All of a sudden there is a drop. The ‘surging smoke’ beneath Satan vanishes, and he falls into a ‘vast vacuity’:

⁴⁵ Richardson (Junior and Senior), *Explanatory Notes* (1734), 438.

all unawares
Fluttering his pennons vain plumb down he drops
Ten thousand fathom deep, and to this hour
Down had been falling, had not by ill chance
The strong rebuff of some tumultuous cloud
Instinct with fire and nitre hurried him
As many miles aloft. (2.932-38)

It is 'ill chance,' indeed, that Satan is lifted up again. *Chance*, since he falls and rises on random gusts, his course imitating the movements of sin and salvation. *Ill chance*, since the cloud that lifts him from endless obscurity brings the Fiend near the pavilion of the old Anarch.⁴⁶ To the umpire of the vast abrupt, Satan proposes an alliance. To defeat the new order of the world, the realm of chaos ought to enter into league with Hell. The two parties 'may once more / Erect the standard there [on earth] of ancient Night,' he says. 'Yours be the advantage all, mine the revenge' (2.986-87). The Anarch agrees without reservation. God has encroached too much on his borders, he complains,

Weakening the sceptre of old Night: first hell
Your dungeon stretching far and wide beneath;
Now lately heaven and earth, another world
Hung o'er my realm, linked in a golden chain . . .
So much the nearer danger: go and speed;
Havoc and spoil and ruin are my gain. (2.1001-9)

Chaos appears here as a force opposed to any sort of order in the cosmos, 'a broken foe' of the new world (2.1039), the spokesman for a disorder that is able to frighten even a creature of Satan's stature. The snarl of his last line persists long afterward. It is with the Anarch's fingerprints still evident that Sin and Death 'advance,' in Book 10, 'to waste and havoc yonder world' (616-17).

Satan, it is true, vitiates his alliance with the Anarch when he returns to Hell. The poem's avatar of malevolence boasts to the devils in Book 10 of the terrible labour of his

⁴⁶ Milton describes Chaos as a place and as a personage. A similar conception appears in the *Aeneid*, where the dual aspects of this figure are juxtaposed early in Aeneas's trip to the Underworld: '*Di, quibus imperium est animarum, umbraeque silentes / et Chaos et Phlegethon, loca nocte tacentia late*' (*Aeneid* 6.264-65). The foremost concern of this chapter is the presence and function of the abyss itself; I shall touch only for a moment on the allegorical figures who reside there. Leonard, 'Milton, Lucretius, and "the Void Profound of Unessential Night"' (2000), ruminates, with considerable success, on the particular features of these characters. With Addison, I tend to prefer, over such 'empty insubstantial beings,' Milton's descriptions of the 'immense waste of matter'; these 'carry in them a greater measure of probability.' See *Spectator* 273 (12 January 1712) and 309 (23 February 1712), in Addison, *Works*, ed. Hurd, rev. Bohn (1889-93), Vol. 3, 183, 216-17.

journey to topple God's creation. In the tone of Odysseus, recounting his troubles to listeners in Phaeacia, the Fiend presents himself as an enemy of chance, Chaos's adversary:

Long were to tell
 What I have done, what suffered, with what pain
 Voyaged the unreal, vast, unbounded deep
 Of horrible confusion . . . plunged in the womb
 Of unoriginal Night and Chaos wild,
 That jealous of their secrets fiercely opposed
 My journey strange, with clamorous uproar
 Protesting fate supreme. (10.469-80)

Most of this is a lie. 'Disparted chaos,' however, does roar at the Fiend's final homeward steps. The bridge begun by Sin and Death earlier in Book 10 has provoked the clamour of the deep, by now, and dark elements smash against new boundaries they cannot overrun. As Satan strolls down this new 'causeway to hell gate' (10.415), waves of disorder assault his path 'with rebounding surge,' indignant, like Aeolus's winds, 'indignantes . . . circum claustra fremunt' (*Aeneid* 1.55-56).

Critics point to this late hostility between chaos and Hell as a demonstration of the true colour of their relationship. In a recent study, John Rumrich has argued that the agreement in Book 2 is always a sham. The devils are inclined to 'rigidity and parodic orderliness,' he observes, not confusion. They 'occupy themselves . . . with niceties of place and status, boundary and limit.'⁴⁷ Satan, for example, 'recovers, *as from* confusion' when he rises from the flaming pool in Book 1.⁴⁸ Not for long, either, do his cohorts remain in the gloomy jumble of their plunge. The Fiend soon restores the 'perfect ranks' that assaulted Heaven; soon, in Hell, do the rebels move again in 'perfect phalanx' (1.550). Pandaemonium rises from the ground 'with the sound / Of dulcet symphonies and voices sweet' (1.711-12), not the ruinous noise of wind. Hobbes

⁴⁷ Rumrich, *Milton Unbound* (1996), 128. Fallon, *Milton among the Philosophers* (1991), 191 n. 40, takes a similar position. It is worth noting that one of the punishments in Hell is designed to fracture this residual sense of organization: in Book 2, Milton describes harpy-footed Furies whose job it is to ferry the devils across the Lethe, to a 'frozen continent . . . dark and wild,' where they 'feel by turns the bitter change / Of fierce extremes, extremes by change more fierce, / From beds of raging fire to starve in ice' (2.587-88, 598-600). The devils leave 'in confused march forlorn' (2.615).

⁴⁸ See the Argument to Book 1; the emphasis is mine.

characterised the effects of rebellion as a reduction ‘of all Order, Government, and Society, to the first Chaos of Violence, and Civill Warre.’⁴⁹ The devils themselves, however, are not afflicted by such eruptions. The elements of the abyss compete against one another ‘for mastery,’ and in our world we ‘live in hatred, enmity and strife . . . each other to destroy.’ Yet ‘devil with devil damned . . . firm concord holds’ (2.496-502).

In these figures of order, we may discover once more the infernal affinity for discord and confusion. Return, for a moment, to the scene in which Satan takes leave from the Anarch. Milton writes that he ‘springs upward like a pyramid of fire / Into the wide expanse’ (2.1013-14). For critics like Rumrich and Catherine Gimelli Martin,⁵⁰ this image provides an occasion to reiterate their claim that chaos and Hell are intrinsically different. The flaw in the alliance is evident already, they say, since Satan is represented by an image of structure in a place where government ‘by confusion / Stands.’

Consider, however, the following observation, which appears in *The Reason of Church-Government*:

I say Prelaty thus ascending in a continuall pyramid upon pretence to perfect the Churches unity . . . what does it but teach us that Prelaty is of no force to effect this work which she boasts to be her maister-peice; and that her pyramid aspires and sharpens to ambition, not to perfection, or unity . . . So that Prelaty if she will seek to close up divisions in the Church, must be forc’t to dissolve, and unmake her own pyramidal figure, which she affirmes to be of such uniting power, when as indeed it is the most dividing, and schismaticall forme the Geometricians know of. (*CPW* 1.790)

At this point in the treatise, Milton is arguing against the prelacy’s claim that ecclesiastical hierarchy is necessary to protect the Church against schism. The argument is nonsense, he thinks; the best way to prevent division is simply to make the Gospel available to all men. Milton particularly detests the bishops’ insistence upon a veneer of union in order to advance their own interests. The episcopacy, he says, professes to safeguard a version of concord that actually fosters even greater discord. ‘The remedy which you

⁴⁹ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (London, 1950), 379.

⁵⁰ Rumrich takes this view in *Milton Unbound* (1996), 118-46, and, more recently, in ‘Of Chaos and Nightingales,’ in *Living Texts*, ed. Pruitt (2000), 218-27. See also Catherine Gimelli Martin, ‘The Wages of Sin’ (1997), 161-82.

alledge is the very disease we groan under' (*CPW* 1.791); 'still tell us that you prevent schisme, though schisme and combustion be the very issue of your bodies, your first born; and set your country a bleeding in a Prelatically mutiny, to fight for your pompe' (*CPW* 1.793). In *An Apology against a Pamphlet*, he warns that a 'shew of order' by a minister is often 'the greatest disorder' (*CPW* 1.937). In Book 5 of *Paradise Lost*, we find Lucifer enthroned as on 'a mount / Raised on a mount,' with 'pyramids and towers' (757-58) nearby. Like the 'forked Miters' worn by the bishops, these are badges of schism, not order. Soon the fading lights of angels streak the abyss, and the leader of the revolt stands in Paradise, tormented by 'the hateful siege / Of contraries,'⁵¹ and able to find relief only 'in destroying' (9.121-22, 130).

Let us linger a moment longer on Satan's journey through chaos. Standing on the threshold of Hell, he scans the wide abyss, 'the womb of nature and perhaps her grave' (2.911). Scholars usually point out that Milton is thinking, here, of Lucretius, who says of our world in *De Rerum Natura* that 'the universal parent is also the universal tomb' ('omniparens eadem rerum commune sepulcrum,' 5.259). Lucretius means this as a general proposition about the earth. The elements of which it is composed are mortal, he believes; the tides of mutability touch even dust and the quick of flame. The whole, furthermore, is bound to the nature of its parts. Born from the chance collisions of atoms, the earth itself must at last 'give way and collapse with a horrendous crash.' Land and sea will be reduced, eventually, to flaring atom-streams; death will receive all things 'with vast gaping jaws.' For Lucretius, this final dissolution is a necessary condition of existence, although, at an arresting moment in *De Rerum Natura*, he

⁵¹ In Satan's 'siege,' as Fowler rightly points out in his edition of *Paradise Lost* (second ed., London, 1998), a soul full of pain is surrounded by the delights of Paradise: 'the more I see / Pleasures about me, so much more I feel / Torment within me' (9.119-121). This state of being is associated with chaos and with sin. It is appropriate, then, that 'siege' can also refer to a 'throne' or a 'rank' — as when Othello boasts that 'I fetch my life and being / From men of royal siege' (1.2.21-23). Satan's overemphasis on order and hierarchy has engendered the perpetual battle within. Like the Anarch, and the devils who thirst for Lethe, he finds satisfaction only in the thought of undoing creation.

expresses his hope that he will not be around for the end.⁵² If atoms did not exist in a perpetual state of flux, their random movements never could have coalesced into the world in the first place. For us, in our own lives, there is the smaller consolation of a ‘deathless death’ (‘mors . . . immortalis’), the solace of the uncut hair of graves. ‘No one is consigned to the black abyss of Tartarus,’ Lucretius writes. ‘Everyone’s component matter is needed to enable succeeding generations to grow’ (3.965-66).

A version of ‘omniparens eadem rerum commune sepulcrum’ appears in Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. As he gathers herbs for physic in Act 2, Friar Laurence remarks that ‘the earth that’s nature’s mother is her tomb: / What is her burying grave, that is her womb.’⁵³ The maxim serves to introduce a set of observations about the field of the world. The earth, the Friar says, raises poisonous weeds as well as healing shoots. Her growth may either hasten our return to the soil or prolong it. Indeed, these properties — tomb-tending and womb-tending, if you will — often coexist within a single plant. The most lethal flower possesses some curative strength, while the best medicines can cause one to fall ill:

O, mickle is the powerful grace that lies
 In plants, herbs, stones, and their true qualities.
 For naught so vile that on the earth doth live
 But to the earth some special good doth give;
 Nor aught so good but, strain’d from that fair use,
 Revolts from true birth, stumbling on abuse . . .
 Within the infant rind of this weak flower
 Poison hath residence, and medicine power:
 For this, being smelt, with that part cheers each part;
 Being tasted, stays all senses with the heart. (2.3.11-16, 19-22)

It is much the same with men. In us, says Friar Laurence, ‘two . . . opposed kings’ are always competing for the same spot. ‘Grace’ vies against ‘rude will,’ love wrestles with bile; we may blush either from devotion’s rosiness or with the urgings of the flesh. Like the effectiveness of physic, the outcome of the struggle frequently hangs on

⁵² ‘Quod procul ad nobis flectat fortuna gubernans, / et ratio potius quam res persuadeat ipsa’: ‘May piloting fortune steer this catastrophe far from us, and may reasoning rather than reality convince you’ (of the world’s necessary end). *DRN* 5.107-8.

⁵³ *Romeo and Juliet* 2.3.9-10. In this study, all citations of Shakespeare draw from *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans et al. (second ed., Boston, 1997).

circumstance. The Friar, just before Romeo enters, issues an important reminder to the audience of this tragedy of bad timing. ‘Virtue itself turns vice being misapplied,’ he says, ‘and vice sometime’s by action dignified’ (2.3.17-18).

The sententious musings provoked in *Romeo and Juliet* by ‘the infant rind of this weak flower’ (2.3.19) may remind the reader of Milton’s own ruminations, in *Areopagitica*, about ‘the rinde of one apple tasted.’ After Adam and Eve’s fatal mistake, he writes, ‘the knowledge of good and evil as two twins cleaving together leapt forth into the World’:

And perhaps this is that doom which Adam fell into of knowing good and evill, that is to say of knowing good by evill. As therefore the state of man now is; what wisdome can there be to choose, what continence to forbear without the knowledge of evil? (*CPW* 2.514)

This claim differs, importantly, from Friar Laurence’s. The ‘opposed kings’ of Milton’s account are mutually constitutive. It is as if the Friar were to make a stronger statement: not that every plant contains poison as well as medicine, but that every plant contains poison *because* it contains medicine. Good and evil, Milton argues, ‘grow up together almost inseparably’ (*CPW* 2.514) in the world beyond Eden’s high walls. Our lives are full of experiences that can lead us towards either one — of ‘things, uncertainly and yet equally working to good, and to evill’ (*CPW* 2.528). In *Areopagitica*, Milton makes it clear that these remarks pertain only to the fallen state of man. Elsewhere, he is less careful. *The Reason of Church-Government* wonders about the possibility of testing ‘an unfained goodness and magnanimity,’ ‘if there were no opposition.’ In the commonplace book, Milton paraphrases Lactantius: ‘Why does God permit evil? So that the account can stand correct with goodness. For the good is made known, is made clear, and is exercised by evill.’⁵⁴

In its shape, this position is surprisingly similar to the statement we looked at a moment ago in *De Rerum Natura*. For Lucretius, ‘omniparens’ depends upon ‘sepulcrum,’ just as the possibility of goodness, on Milton’s view, is tangled up with the

⁵⁴ *CPW* 1.795, 1.363. Milton usually does qualify his view. See, for example, *CPW* 2.293-94 and 6.352-53.

existence of evil. Virtue always involves an act of choice, an awareness of the vice you are deciding against. One interpretation of ‘the womb of nature and perhaps her grave,’ indeed, elevates the description itself to the status of a moral principle. The fertile properties of Milton’s abyss, we may want to say, are attended by destructive ones. Set against the work of the ‘Author of all being’ (3.374) is a region which threatens its ‘utter loss’ (2.440) — a phrase echoed, significantly, by Satan in Book 9.⁵⁵ In *Areopagitica*, Milton compares the mixedness of knowledge to the messy heap of seeds (‘seminum . . . passivam congeriem’) put before Psyche in Apuleius’s *Metamorphoses*.⁵⁶ The task of the ‘true warfaring Christian’ is rather like the work demanded of that unfortunate daughter-in-law. Grain by grain, moment by moment, a man must separate good from evil — ‘and yet abstain, and yet distinguish, and yet prefer’ (CPW 2.514). The creative act undertaken in Book 7 involves a similar effort. To ‘set a compass on the face of the depth’ (Proverbs 8:27) is, in the epic, to divide a small area of light from a sea of troubles. *Spiritus Dei incubabat*, ‘the Spirit of God moved’ (Genesis 1:3) — ‘his brooding wings,’ for Milton, ‘the spirit of God outspread’ — ‘but downward purged / The black tartareous cold infernal dregs / Adverse to life’ (7.235-39).

What is most startling about ‘the womb of nature and perhaps her grave,’ however, is the ‘perhaps.’ The word causes the line to forego the neatness of an aphorism. Alastair Fowler remarks that Milton, here, avoids ‘commitment to any particular cosmological theory.’⁵⁷ It is true that the poet leaves open the actual fate of the earth. In *Paradise Lost*, he writes of the end of days: of ‘this world’s dissolution’ (12.459), of a ‘new heaven and earth’ that will rise ‘from her ashes’ (3.334-35).

⁵⁵ As he contemplates his task in Eden, before adopting the shape of the serpent:

For only in destroying find I ease
To my relentless thoughts; and him destroyed,
Or won to what may work his utter loss,
For whom all this was made. (9.129-132)

⁵⁶ Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 6.10.

⁵⁷ On *PL* 2.911, in his edition of *Paradise Lost* (1998), 155.

Whether ‘the death of this foul and polluted world’ implies ‘the actual abolition of the world’s substance, or only a change in its qualities, is uncertain,’ Milton remarks in *De Doctrina*. The question ‘does not really concern us’ (6.627). It is not surprising, therefore, that a statement about the destiny of nature in *Paradise Lost* contains what Sextus Empiricus calls an expression of ‘non-assertion.’⁵⁸ Compare, however, the effect of ‘the womb of nature and perhaps her grave’ to a similar line in Book 7. God rests from creation, and the angels sing of the new world:

Of amplitude almost immense, with stars
Numerous, and every star perhaps a world
Of destined habitation. (621-23)

Here, again, a ‘perhaps’ in the fourth foot, and a nod to Lucretius.⁵⁹ To their wonder at the generosity of God, infinite, unmeasurable, who has responded to sin by forming ‘another heaven’ (7.616), the angels add a speculation that serves only to magnify their praise. Marvellous to them is the thought that the earth might not be God’s only gift. A universe of ‘amplitude almost immense’ (7.620), the angels suppose, may one day become milky with His goodness; one day it may be filled with an empire of planets, with worlds upon worlds. The impression left by ‘perhaps her grave’ is precisely the opposite. The effect is of a closing, not an opening. In Book 2 of *Paradise Lost*, the reader is presented with the thought of further creation. The forces of chaos, Milton writes, will forever grapple ‘unless the almighty maker them ordain / His dark materials to create more worlds’ (915-16). ‘Perhaps her grave’ puts even more pressure upon that ‘unless.’ The phrase holds the possibility of an endless universe of death. The material that batters against the heavens and the earth may one day succeed. One day God may

⁵⁸ Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, 1.195: ‘Certainly the person who says “perhaps it is” is implicitly affirming also the seemingly contradictory phrase “perhaps it is not” by his refusal to make the positive assertion that “it is.”’ I refer to the Loeb edition of the *Works*, trans. R.G. Bury (New York, 1933-49), Vol. 1, 113-15.

⁵⁹ *DRN* 2.1070 ff.: ‘If the fund of seeds is so vast that the sum of the lives of all living creatures would not suffice to count it, if the same force of nature is still operative and possesses the power to assemble all the seeds of things in the same order in which they have been assembled in our world, you are bound to admit [*necesse est confiteare*] that in other parts of the universe there are other worlds inhabited by many different people and species of wild beasts.’

allow our world to be swallowed into the yawning abyss. And the end of creation may be this: a lifeless infinitude of matter, full of fury and sound.

The worry touching the line will become more apparent if we make a small diversion. You may recall that Origen was charged as a Stoic for wondering whether the world was part of a sequence. He posited a succession of creations: corrupt works demolished and replaced by better ones, until the earth, like a body cleansed of sin, put on immortality and dwelled with God forever. Origen confessed he did not know the number or measure of these events.⁶⁰ A similar thought appears in rabbinic discussions of creation. One saying is Rabbi Abbahu's, in a midrash on Genesis 1:5 ('And the evening and the morning were the first day'):

And there was evening . . . This proves that the Holy One, blessed be He, went on creating worlds and destroying them until He created this one and declared, 'This one pleases Me: those did not please Me.' R. Phinehas said: This is R. Abbahu's reason: And God saw everything that He had made, and, behold, it was very good (Gen. 1:31): this pleases Me, but those did not please Me.'⁶¹

These observations, unlike Origen's, stand in the confidence that the present world is the satisfactory one. The interpreter finds an exegetical foothold by looking to the end of the Bible's first chapter, when the Creator surveys His work and declares its goodness. The word 'behold,' in Genesis 1:31, draws Rabbi Abbahu's attention: the interjection represents an act of judgment, a comparison, he suggests, as though only what God saw now 'was very good.'⁶² Only at the end do we see that the present world is worth keeping. This breathtaking conjecture lends to the Genesis narrative a tension heretofore not disclosed. The shaping of worlds upon worlds no longer bears the mark of design, as it does for Origen. There is no claim of a necessary progress through corruption.

⁶⁰ Origen, *On First Principles* 2.3, trans. G.W. Butterworth (Gloucester, MA, 1973), esp. 83-89. According to Photius, Clement of Alexandria held a similar position. See, *ibid*, 84 n. 1.

⁶¹ *Midrash Rabbah*, trans. H. Freedman et al. (London, 1939), Vol. 1 (*Bereshit*), 23-24. Denis Saurat introduces the same parallel in his *Milton* (1925), 285-86. His interest is in establishing a linkage between *Paradise Lost* and the Kabbalah. I suggest no relationship of this sort; I present the midrash as one conclusion towards which thoughts about Genesis can be drawn.

⁶² The midrash also plays on the linguistic similarity between 'behold,' *hinei*, and the verb 'to please,' *l'hanin*.

Instead, the thought of multiple creations, of past earths laid waste, forces the reader to re-evaluate the hand at the centre of the process. Here is a God who works through trial, with a wastebasket of worlds at His feet.

Later entrants to this tradition held that the many worlds before this one were destroyed by an excess of divine judgment. God's over-strictness, His setting of too many limits, caused them to collapse. For the earth to rise from the 'formlessness and void' (Genesis 1:2) of previous attempts, grace was needed, compassion, to slow the Creator's dividing hand.⁶³ This idea might have pleased Milton, who was interested in the negotiation between Mercy and Justice, and planned their dialogue for his epic.⁶⁴ In a Christian setting, however, fraught as it is with the typology of salvation, a Father who creates and destroys is easily made to bear a sinister aspect. Consider the case of Byron's *Cain*. At the centre of that short play is a God who has formed 'out of old worlds this one in a few days.'⁶⁵ In the second act, Lucifer teaches Cain of death. The two of them fly to see dusky masses, a dreadful immensity of matter past the sun; the 'swimming shadows' (2.2.31) and husks of previous worlds mouldering in twilight. The reader, like Cain, is appalled with restless questions. Was it for this that the universe was begun? For this, that God ended a creaky eternity alone? 'Let him / Sit on his vast and solitary throne,' Lucifer says in an astonishing passage in Act 1,

Creating worlds, to make eternity
Less burthensome to his immense existence
And unparticipated solitude;
Let him crowd orb on orb: he is alone
Indefinite, Indissoluble Tyrant;
Could he but crush himself, 'twere the best boon
He ever granted. (1.147-155)

⁶³ This idea is discussed by Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York, 1974), 266-67.

⁶⁴ Evidence of the discussion appears in the Cambridge manuscript, which can be found in *Col.* 18.229. The exchange never appears. In Book 3, God speaks briefly on the subject: 'In mercy and justice both, / Through heaven and earth, so shall my glory excel, / But mercy first and last shall brightest shine' (3.132-34).

⁶⁵ *Cain* 1.530. I refer to the *Complete Poetical Works*, ed. Jerome J. McGann et al. (Oxford, 1980-93), Vol. 6.

For Byron, the fathomless debris of other days gives rise to worries of a teleological variety. The thought of ‘unborn myriads of unconscious atoms’ (2.2.42), of *tohu* and *vohu* and worlds allowed to die, nurtures suspicion about God. It calls into question the intentions of an omnipotent Being who works so sloppily, or, so to say, so imperfectly. What, after all, is the use of His labour? What purpose can be found for the animation of substance, when there are indications that a dim entombment or dissolution may be all that lies ahead?

These concerns are not foreign to Milton. It is worth bearing in mind that the poet makes two claims for substance *ex Deo* in *De Doctrina*. ‘Neque enim materia illa res mala est, aut vilis existimanda’: ‘this original matter was not an evil thing, nor to be thought of as worthless’ (CPW 6.308). We have considered the first part of this statement at some length, but little attention, thus far, has gone to its second half. It is natural to assume that such qualities are linked. In Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*, for instance, chaos is ‘hatefull’ since it does not participate in light and ‘the state of life.’⁶⁶

Yet it must always remain to provide the material for natural production:

Daily they grow, and daily forth are sent
 Into the world, it to replenish more:
 Yet is the stocke not lessened, nor spent,
 But still remains in everlasting store,
 As it at first created was of yore.
 For in the wide wombe of the world there lyes,
 In hatefull darknesse and in deepe horrore,
 An huge eternall Chaos, which supplyes
 The substances of natures fruitfull progenyes. (3.6.36)

Milton does not address so directly the persistence of the lonely reservoir of *Paradise Lost*. A genial resolution, however, does not seem possible for him. Several pages ago, we considered an amended version of the proposition in *De Doctrina*, its inverse, in fact. We wondered whether the existence of the abyss can be justified on the grounds that it is not good. Suppose you remain unconvinced by this claim. Suppose you feel, as C.S. Lewis did, that the poetry is an unsound basis for conclusions about the theology. The

⁶⁶ Citations of Spenser refer to *The Faerie Queene*, second ed., ed. A.C. Hamilton et al. (London, 2001), and the Yale edition of the *Shorter Poems*, ed. William A. Oram et al. (New Haven, 1989).

rejection of the argument for malevolence clears the way for a second difficulty. How is chaos 'worthwhile'? 'Not evil' and 'not worthless,' that is, will not cooperate. Each side of Milton's statement about matter excludes the other. To find chaos useful is to gesture towards the Manichaeic universe we have been considering. To ignore its evil potential is to wrestle with the existence of endless substance that stands ready to snuff out creation. Or, to put it another way: either the 'black tartareous cold infernal dregs' expelled from creation are infernal, and necessary; or they are not infernal, and evidently without purpose.

IV.

The cosmos need not look this way. In Book 3 of *Paradise Lost*, Uriel implicitly imagines an alternative:

I saw when at his word the formless mass,
This world's material mould, came to a heap:
Confusion heard his voice, and wild uproar
Stood ruled, stood vast infinitude confined:
Till at his second bidding darkness fled,
Light shone, and order from disorder sprung. (3.708-13)

The angel, here, makes no mention of leftover material. We may conceive that God, infinitely wise, would know just how much matter to send out of Himself in order to make the world. The Son easily might go out from Heaven in Book 7 to calm the waves and organise the warring atoms entirely.

The sequence of thought that leads Milton to a lasting chaos is on view only briefly in *Paradise Lost*. It appears as God speaks to the angelic ranks in Book 7, just before they depart for the fighting sea. The new world will repair the damages of war, God says. Then He pauses, and there is a change of key:

Speak thou, and be it done:
My overshadowing spirit and might with thee
I send along, ride forth, and bid the deep
Within appointed bounds be heaven and earth.
Boundless the deep, because I am who fill
Infinitude, nor vacuous the space.
Though I uncircumscribed myself retire,
And put not forth my goodness, which is free

To act or not, necessity and chance
Approach not me, and what I will is fate. (7.164-73)

With ‘appointed bounds,’ in line 167, God halts, overhears Himself. ‘Bounds’ suggests ‘boundless’; the new world will have limits, but chaos does not. This contrast is not new to the poem. We have read already in Book 2 of the ‘dark / Illimitable ocean’ through which Satan flies, ‘without bound, / Without dimension’ (891-93). God, however, adds the suggestion that the attributes of the abyss follow from His own. ‘Sine fine chaos, et sine fine Deus,’ according to the commendatory elegiacs that preface the 1674 edition of *Paradise Lost*.⁶⁷ Or, rather, ‘sine fine chaos, *quia* sine fine Deus’: ‘*because* I am who fill / Infinitude’ — the nod to Exodus 3:14 is certain enough⁶⁸ — the abyss which accommodates God must be ‘boundless,’ cannot be ‘vacuous.’

Patrick Hume, who had no *De Doctrina*, assumed a creation *ex nihilo* and was quite unable to understand a chaos as limitless as God. It seemed to him to challenge the uniqueness of divine infinitude. He reasoned that a ‘neither’ must be implied before ‘boundless’: *neither* ‘boundless the deep . . . *nor* vacuous the space,’ that is, ‘for neither is the immeasurable Deep without its Bounds, nor any space so vast as to be void and empty.’ The expanses of the abyss cannot be beyond God, or without Him, Hume thought. ‘I [God] alone am Infinite, comprehend all, my self incomprehensible, beyond all bounds, fill every space, and am every where.’⁶⁹ The problem Hume addresses is solved as soon as you are familiar with Milton’s *ex Deo* argument. If chaos once was one with the Creator, there is no sense in worrying that it might surpass or escape Him. The poem, in fact, follows Hume’s intuition but embraces the conclusion he pushes aside. A limitless God fills the universe, thus the universe is limitless. ‘Boundless the

⁶⁷ The verses (‘In Paradisum Amissum’) are the work of S.B., probably Milton’s friend Samuel Barrow. They are reprinted in Fowler’s edition of *Paradise Lost* (1998). On their authorship, see Masson, *Life* (1880), Vol. 6, 714-15.

⁶⁸ And Moses said unto God . . . “they shall say to me, What is his name? what shall I say to them?” And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM’ (Exodus 3:13-14). Bentley, in his edition of *Paradise Lost* (1732), amplifies the reference by revising the capitalization of Milton’s line: ‘because I Am who fill.’

⁶⁹ Patrick Hume, *Annotations on Milton’s ‘Paradise Lost’* (London, 1695), 215, on PL 7.168.

deep, because I am / Who fill infinitude.’ The thought appears to be that God would have difficulty occupying a bordered cosmos. He would not fit; it would be like trying to force King Kong into a Volkswagen. Chaos ‘is boundless because God is infinite,’ writes Maurice Kelley⁷⁰ — but how strange a claim this is! For creation must always be less than God. Recall Augustine’s proposition concerning created things: ‘non essent omnia, si essent aequalia.’ One tends to assume, blithely perhaps, that the constraints of the process can be worked out without the introduction of endless space, enormous matter. Certainly such an understanding sits behind God’s words to Jeremiah: ‘Am I a God at hand, saith the Lord, and not a God afar off? . . . Do not I fill heaven and earth?’ (Jeremiah 23: 23-24).

In the *Summa Theologica*, Thomas Aquinas arrives at an elegant account of divine presence by concluding that ‘to be in a place’ means something different for bodies, for angels, and for God.⁷¹ A body resides in a place ‘in a circumscribed fashion,’ Aquinas writes, ‘since it is measured by the place.’ An angel is present ‘definitively’; ‘he is in one place in such a manner that he is not in another.’ God, on the other hand, ‘is neither circumscriptively nor definitely there, because He is everywhere.’⁷² In one sense, the description of the Father in Book 7 of *Paradise Lost* is far more expansive. Limited by neither place nor time, Milton’s God exists everywhere in a universe that is also everywhere. At the same time, His presence throughout an unending cosmos prepares the way for a strange and vexing act of restriction:

Though I uncircumscribed myself retire,
And put not forth my goodness, which is free
To act or not, necessity and chance
Approach not me, and what I will is fate. (7.170-73)

These lines are among the most disputed in *Paradise Lost*. They firmly dismiss Keats’s contention that Milton’s ‘Philosophy . . . may be tolerably understood by one not much

⁷⁰ Maurice Kelley, *This Great Argument* (Princeton, 1941), 211.

⁷¹ C.S. Lewis discusses these remarks in *A Preface to ‘Paradise Lost’* (Oxford, 1942), 87.

⁷² *Summa Theologica*, Pt. 1, Q. 52, Art. 2, in *The Basic Writings of St. Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Anton C. Pegis (Indianapolis, 1997), Vol. 1, 500.

advanced in years.’⁷³ We linger on the passage only for a moment, just long enough to notice that, like so many in Book 7, it has a partner in the account of the war in Book 6. The analogue is forgettable, easily missed among the tempests and eyes and dreadful shade of the rebels’ expulsion. As the Son stands before the defeated party, ‘exhausted, spiritless, afflicted, fall’n,’ he stays his hand:

half his strength he put not forth, but checked
His thunder in mid-volley, for he meant
Not to destroy, but to root them out of heaven. (6.853-55)

The work of destruction is incomplete. The Son has firepower enough to unmake the devils, but he does not do so. The work of creation is much the same. From a chaos so large as to accommodate an unending sweetness of divine breath, God chooses a world of limits. He stops; He stays His hand before the rush of light. ‘I uncircumscribed myself retire, / And put not forth my goodness.’ Scores of later commentators have not matched the clarity of the Richardsons’ paraphrase: ‘Though I be not, Cannot be Circumscrib’d, I can Bound, can Retire the Actual Exercise of my Goodness, as in Confining it for the Present to This New Creation.’⁷⁴ God ‘sets bounds to [His] goodness,’ Zachary Pearce wrote. He does not ‘exert it every where.’⁷⁵

⁷³ In a letter to John Reynolds, 3 May 1818. In Keats’s *Letters*, ed. Rollins (1918), Vol. 1, 281. Milton’s lines have caused a fair share of dispute, even among the most judicious readers of the poem. No space is available in the present discussion to review the entire history of critical argument, which was reignited at the beginning of the last century by Denis Saurat. Saurat, in *Milton* (1925), 238, called God’s speech ‘the most important passage in *Paradise Lost* from the philosophical point of view, as well as the most characteristic,’ and made it the centrepiece for a theory of divine retraction which Milton, he claimed, had found in the Zohar. The energy of the resulting debate is apparent in the 1939 volume of the *Review of English Studies*, in which these lines are the subject of an ungentlemanly exchange between Saurat and Arthur Sewell. See *RES* 15 (1939), 73-80. The culprit for the confusion surrounding Milton’s meaning may well be Richard Bentley, who altered the punctuation of the passage by changing the comma after ‘to act or not’ (7.172) to a full stop. This emendation allowed critics to read ‘though I . . . myself retire’ as if the clause were dependent on ‘boundless the deep . . . nor vacuous the space,’ thereby lending weight to theories of a divine withdrawal. Although Zachary Pearce noticed the problem immediately (*A Review of the Twelve Books of Milton’s ‘Paradise Lost’* [London, 1733], 241), the revision was still appearing in nineteenth-century editions of *Paradise Lost*, including David Masson’s (London, 1874). It was left to Helen Gardner to banish it, in her edition of Milton’s *Poems* (Oxford, 1961), 301.

⁷⁴ Richardson (Junior and Senior), *Explanatory Notes* (1734), 301.

⁷⁵ Pearce, *A Review* (1733), 241.

Bentley was puzzled by ‘goodness,’ which seemed to him too slight to be ‘put forth’ or ‘put not forth.’ Plainly, he observed, Milton had intended to write ‘greatness.’⁷⁶ The more pressing issue is one of motive rather than of heft. The difference and the trouble are both made clear in *Paradise Regained*, when Jesus asseverates that the whole point of creation is the demonstration of divine benevolence, not divine glory:

since his Word all things produced,
 Though chiefly not for glory as prime end,
 But to shew forth his goodness, and impart
 His good communicable to every soul
 Freely. (3.123-26)

This chapter started from the assumption of a good universe, ‘omnisque boni postmodum . . . seminarium,’ the symbol and sign of divine munificence. At the moment of creation, however, God ceases, retreats. Instead of ‘shew forth,’ ‘put *not* forth,’ and the cosmos of *Paradise Lost* is born. A world is fashioned of no wide creeping, warm, fragile, surrounded not by what Dante called the ‘infinite excess’ of God’s Word,⁷⁷ but by unsounded expanses of matter and space.

⁷⁶ Bentley, *Paradise Lost* (1732), 223. He may be remembering the Son’s strong cautions to God concerning Hell’s plan: ‘So should thy goodness and thy greatness both / Be questioned and blasphemed without defence’ (3.165-66).

⁷⁷ *Paradiso* 19.45.

II : Concerning Indifferents

Two questions appear at the opening of Book 2 of *Paradise Regained*. ‘Whither is he gone?’ ‘Will he now retire / After appearance, and again prolong / Our expectation?’ Andrew and Simon worry about Jesus’s long absence in the wilderness, and comfort themselves with prayer. ‘God of Israel, / Send thy Messiah forth, the time is come’ (2.42-43). If the reader, in passing, notes a similarity to the language of creation in *Paradise Lost*,¹ that sense is quickened by the apostles’ assertion that there will be no retreat this time. ‘He will not fail, / Nor will withdraw him now,’ they say, ‘nor will recall, / Mock us with his blest sight, then snatch him hence’ (2.55-56).²

Thirty years earlier, in the sixteen forties, Milton had begun to write of another, more permanent divine withdrawal. Much of his work in the first half of the decade is concerned with the somewhat vexing act by which Christ, cancelling the laws set out in the Bible, releases man from the rule of Heaven. This unbinding is the subject of the present chapter, which takes up an evolving distinction in Milton’s prose between the aspects of human lives that are governed by Scriptural ordinance, and those parts that the Bible does *not* order. The latter area — an area *ex Templo*, I call it — turns out to provide fertile ground for the establishment of real and substantial human liberty. At the same time, this space unmarked by Heaven is not without some of the less appealing qualities that have been attributed, already, to Milton’s chaos.

Hilaire Belloc wrote in amusement at the ‘negative vagueness’ of Milton’s first attempts at pamphleteering. ‘One who reads this inflamed stuff cannot but notice how

¹ ‘My overshadowing spirit and might with thee / I send along, ride forth, and bid the deep / Within appointed bounds be heaven and earth’ (7.165-68).

² It is worth noting that the last lines of *Paradise Regained* present an image of retreat: ‘He unobserved / Home to his mother’s house private returned’ (4.638-39). ‘Private’ — an important word for Milton — comes from the Latin *privatus*, ‘withdrawn,’ the passive perfect participle of *privare*, ‘to bereave’ or ‘to deprive.’

the writer of it lacks grip: plenty of sound but no clear principle.’³ He pointed out, to the pleasure of anyone who has been frustrated by the divorce tracts, that they are the origin of a sonnet so bad one has trouble accepting it as Milton’s:

A book was writ of late called *Tetrachordon*;
And woven close, both matter, form, and style;
The subject new: it walked the town awhile,
Numbering good intellects; now seldom pored-on. (1-4)

The early writing, it is true, exhibits an inconsistency of tone and purpose. Milton cultivates a maddening tendency to present, all at once, ‘modernist appeals to freedom from the letter of the law, medieval appeals to Scripture, and distortions of it for his purpose.’⁴ We need not say, with Stephen Dedalus (who is thinking of Shakespeare): ‘A man of genius makes no mistakes. His errors are volitional and are the portals of discovery.’⁵ Milton, however, is aware of some of the problems that his readers have inventoried, and the oversupply of rhetoric and argument in these works is a chief part of their appeal.

I.

Let us begin not with a compass but with a *κάλαμος*, a reed. In the Book of Revelation, after the sounding of six trumpets and the thunder of seven thunders, John reports that he was given ‘a reed like unto a rod’:

And the angel stood, saying, Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein. / But the court which is without the temple leave out, and measure it not; for it is given unto the Gentiles: and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months. (Revelation 11:1-2)

³ Hilaire Belloc, *Milton* (Philadelphia, 1935), 154: ‘It is always a set of reasons *against* some existing thing — never, or hardly ever, a definite proposal of policy.’

⁴ Rose Macaulay, *Milton* (second ed., London, 1957), 81.

⁵ James Joyce, *Ulysses*, ed. Hans Walter Gabler et al. (New York, 1986), 156. This moment is as good as any to remark that the choice of pronouns has given me a great deal of trouble while writing this chapter. The problem is not just one of elegance or sensibility. The works discussed here are all specifically addressed to a male audience; the divorce pamphlets, in particular, give little thought to the sufferings of women, and it is incorrect to write of Milton’s view of matrimony as though the choices of men and women were interchangeable. (See fn. 42, below.) For this reason, I use male pronouns almost exclusively, and apologise to readers who find this convention dated or offensive.

The task commanded of the evangelist is a work of separation. The dimensions to be reckoned are those of the inner temple; ‘the court which is without the temple leave out,’ John is told, ‘and measure it not.’ In this respect, his survey differs from the act described by Ezekiel, who, in a vision, follows a man with a ‘measuring reed’ as he determines the proportions of a new temple. For Ezekiel, the accounting of pilasters and vestibules and passageways — ‘the inner house,’ and the gates beyond — is a figure for the restoration of Israel.⁶ John’s survey is more like the sealing of the 144,000, in Revelation 7. It is an assertion of difference, between sanctified and unsanctified,⁷ between the pure and those without faith. Unlike Ezekiel’s, the evangelist’s measurements include men (‘them that worship within’) as well as spaces (‘the temple of God, and the altar’). Underlying the act is the metaphor apparent in I Corinthians 3:16: ‘Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?’

Milton presents these ‘visions of S. John’ in *The Reason of Church-Government*, but he adds to the task a suggestion of difficulty. It is not easy to tell apart the courtyard and the sanctuary. They may look just the same:

That part of the Temple which is not measur’d, so farre is it from being in Gods tuition or delight, that in the following verse he rejects it, however in shew and visibility it may seeme a part of his Church, yet in as much as it lyes thus unmeasur’d he leaves it to be traml’d by the Gentiles, that is to be polluted with idolatrous and Gentilish rites and ceremonies. (CPW 1.761)

Milton interprets the evangelist’s survey as a figure for the reformation of the Church. The architecture of the temple stands for the organization of the clergy. John measures out the rules of ecclesiastical government, and separates practices that lie within ‘Gods

⁶ The prophet promises a place in which God ‘will reside among the people of Israel for ever’ (Ezekiel 43:7). The measurement of the temple spans Ezekiel 40:5 to 43:5. Milton cites this passage in *The Reason of Church-Government*, and offers the interpretation preferred by most Christian exegetes: in Ezekiel’s ‘typicall and shadowie’ prophecy, God seeks ‘to weane the hearts of the Jewes from their old law,’ and ‘sets out before their eyes the stately fabrick & constitution of his Church’ (CPW 1.757). A similar scene appears in Zechariah 2:1-4, in which the prophet sees a man ‘with a measuring line in his hand,’ who goes ‘to measure Jerusalem, to see what is the breadth thereof, and what is the length thereof.’

⁷ The same distinction is available in the origins of the word ‘profane,’ from the Latin *pro + fanus*, ‘out of the temple.’

appointment' from those that do not. The task serves as a model for Milton's own strategy against the episcopacy. He would pace out the Church's shape, with borders wending through custom, past prelates 'belching the sore *Crudities* of yesterdayes *Poperie*' (CPW 1.540). The Bible alone will dictate the structure and its limits. 'Let them chaunt while they will of prerogatives, we shall tell them of Scripture; of custom, we of Scripture; of Acts and Statutes, stil of Scripture,' Milton writes in *The Reason of Church-Government*, 'til the quick and pearcing word enter to the dividing of their soules, & the mighty weakness of the Gospel throw down the weak mightines of mans reasoning' (CPW 1.827).

The reform described in the anti-episcopal tracts bears an unexpected resemblance to the description of creation in *Paradise Lost*. In both cases, what is required first is the separation of order from disorder. Through the vast profundity obscure, 'thus far extend, thus far thy bounds' (PL 7.230), says the Son, before proceeding with the series of divisions set out for Him in the first chapter of Genesis. The Church also is to rise out of confusion. It will emerge from the slurry of human invention and Scriptural warrant that holds sway in England. The bishops, Milton argues, compare 'the sacred verity of Saint *Paul* with the offals, and sweepings of antiquity that met as accidentally and absurdly, as *Epicurus* his atoms to patch up a Leucippean *Ignatius*.'⁸ Their Church has been set up atop error, using as brick or beam 'whatsoever time, or the heedlesse hand of blind chance, hath drawne from of old to this present, in her huge dragnet, whether Fish, or Sea-weed, or Shells, or Shrubbs, unpickt, unchosen' (CPW 1.626). Milton rejects the idea that God has left Church government 'at randome without his provident and gracious ordering' (CPW 1.754). The aim of the pamphlets, he says, is to reassert the

⁸ CPW 1.651. The reference is complex. Epicurus denied the existence of Leucippus, the first atomic theorist. See Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, trans. R.D. Hicks (Cambridge, MA, 1925), Vol. 2, 541. Milton expresses similar doubts about the body of work attributed to Ignatius of Antioch, the first-century bishop whose views on the organization of the Church were frequently cited in Reformation debates. Elsewhere in *Of Prelatical Episcopacy*, the poet bemoans Ignatius's 'broken and disjoynted plight' (CPW 1.639), the 'fraud' and 'spuriousness' (CPW 1.626, 1.636) to which his writing has been victim. The comparison links the randomness of Epicurean atomism to the inheritance of the Church Fathers.

structure provided by the Bible, and to guide Englishmen ‘to their firme stations under the standard of the Gospell’ (CPW 1.627). This is an institution of limits, of the design and boundaries authorised by Christ. It is also, like the formation of the world in *Paradise Lost*, an unrubbing. In Milton’s hands, John’s reed becomes a ‘weeding hook’ (CPW 1.777), an iron to cauterise the ‘noysom and diseased tumor’ (CPW 1.598) of prelacy, a knife to amputate the ‘gangrene in the whole *Function*’ (CPW 1.538). When he is fleecing Joseph Hall in the *Animadversions*, the poet borrows the imagery of creation to distinguish his own view from his opponent’s. ‘Trust this man, Readers if you please, whose divinity would reconcile *England* with *Rome*, and his philosophy make friends nature with the *Chaos*’ (CPW 1.671). Guided by Scripture, the true Church will emerge from this confusion with *moenia mundi* of her own: ‘hedg’d about with such a terrible impalement of commands,’ Milton insists, that any man who ‘will break through wilfully to violate the least of them, must hazard the wounding of his conscience even to death’ (CPW 1.760).

The particular task set out in the anti-episcopal pamphlets is made more difficult by the absence of clear instructions regarding Church boundaries in the Bible. Rid of prelatical invention, Milton suggests, the sacred books will protest ‘their own plainnes, and perspicuity’ (CPW 1.566). They will declare the clerical structure ‘ordain’d and set out to us by the appointment of God’ (CPW 1.750). Not for nothing, however, do we find Milton arguing just two decades later for the dismissal of priests, and worship in houses and barns.⁹ Joseph Hall, in his defence of episcopacy, points out that many men vilify custom and teach that Scripture, bare of tradition, will possess light enough to direct them. But consensus among such reformers is extremely rare. ‘The sworne men to this exoticall government, are not agreed of their verdict,’ Hall complains. ‘An exquisite forme they would faine have, but where it was, or what it should be, they accord not.’¹⁰ The root of the problem is that the Bible, like any book, demands of the

⁹ In *Considerations touching the likeliest means* (1659), in CPW 7, esp. 300 ff.

¹⁰ Joseph Hall, *Episcopacie by Divine Right* (London, 1640), 231.

reader an act of interpretation.¹¹ It does not usually behave as it does in Herbert's 'Holy Scriptures (I)':

This verse marks that, and both do make a motion
Unto a third, that ten leaves off doth lie. (5-6)¹²

The sacred books are like stars, no, the stars like sacred books (in fact 'starres are as poor books,' Herbert writes, '& oftentimes do misse') only so far as individuals are able to understand how to navigate by them.

David Masson declares himself unsurprised that the young author of *The Reason of Church-Government* should answer his wife's desertion, two years later, with a work like *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*.¹³ 'The whole action of Milton,' Masson writes, 'was deeply characteristic.' As is his habit, the biographer supplies a snatch of seventeenth-century street-gossip: "Only a month or two married; his wife gone home again; and now, instead of proper reticence about what can't be helped, all this hullabaloo of a new doctrine about Divorce! Just like him!"¹⁴ Was it just like him? It is clear that Mary Powell's departure gave Milton cause to despair at the instruction culled by others from what Locke, at a grave moment, calls the 'plain and intelligible' Gospel.¹⁵ Buffeted by private blows, and faced with accusations of libertinism, the poet came to understand that his support for ecclesiastical reform had done nothing more than to elevate one tyranny over another. By 1644, in *Areopagitica*, he was certain of the

¹¹ This problem has been of frequent interest to Stanley Fish, who considers its implications for *Of Prelatical Episcopacy* in *How Milton Works* (Cambridge, MA, 2001), 115-35. A more general point of departure into the vast critical literature on the subject is Gabriel Josipovici's lively discussion in *The World and the Book* (second ed., London, 1979), 25-51.

¹² I refer to *The Works of George Herbert*, ed. F.E. Hutchinson (Oxford, 1941).

¹³ The story of Milton's marriage to Mary Powell, and the events that followed from her sudden return to Oxfordshire, is best left to the poet's many biographers, of whom Barbara Lewalski, *The Life of John Milton* (Oxford, 2000), is the most recent.

¹⁴ Masson, *Life* (1880), Vol. 3, 51-52, 54.

¹⁵ Locke, *The reasonableness of Christianity: as delivered in the Scriptures* (1695), Ch. 15, in the Clarendon edition, ed. John C. Higgins-Biddle (Oxford, 1999), 171. This is part of a larger argument for toleration. The controversies that divide Christians, Locke writes, make no more sense than 'Arabick' to the 'poor day Labourer' to whom Jesus speaks; 'where the hand is used to the Plough, and the Spade, the head is seldom elevated to sublime Notions, or exercised in mysterious reasonings' (170).

error. 'Bishops and Presbyters are the same to us both name and thing' (*CPW* 2.539).

When Milton remembers this period in the *Second Defence*, however, he lays stress only on the continuities between the anti-prelatical enterprise and the defence of individual freedom that occupied his attention a few years later. 'I had endeavoured from my youth, before all things, not to be ignorant of what was law, whether divine or human.'¹⁶ A backward glance orders the progress of the thought:

When they [the bishops], having become a target for the weapons of all men, had at last fallen and troubled us no more, I directed my attention elsewhere, asking myself whether I could in any way advance the cause of true and substantial liberty . . . Since, then, I observed that there are, in all, three varieties of liberty without which civilized life is scarcely possible, namely ecclesiastical liberty, domestic or personal liberty, and civil liberty, and since I had already written about the first, while I saw that the magistrates were vigorously attending to the third, I took as my province the remaining one, the second or domestic kind. (*CPW* 4.1.623-24)

William Parker hits on what is more likely to be the truth when he writes that the early stages of Milton's career were dictated by the various and unexpected walls into which the poet happened to bump his head. Parker, nevertheless, retains confidence in the claim of the *Second Defence* by calling attention to a tendency of Milton's mind that an earlier critic identifies as its 'consistency of virtue.'¹⁷ The poet 'hated Episcopacy for its emphasis upon externalities and material things, its tyrannical treatment of the individual Christian.' Shackled to a wife to whom he felt no true bond, he 'hated canon law for these same indignities.'¹⁸

A second and more subtle claim appears later in Masson's great study.

Something called 'Miltonism,' he tells us, surfaced in the middle of the poet's third decade:

There had dawned the idea that, as there had come down in the bosom of society

¹⁶ The translation is from the Columbia edition of the *Complete Works*, which catches somewhat more correctly than the *CPW* the sense of the Latin ('ut quid divini, quid humani esset juris, ante omnia possem non ignare'). See *Col.* 8.129.

¹⁷ William Hayley, *The Life of Milton* (London, 1796), 75. 'He contended for religion without seeking emoluments from the church; he contended for the state without aiming at any civil or military employment: truth and justice were the idols of his heart and the study of his life.'

¹⁸ William Riley Parker, *Milton* (Oxford, 1968), Vol. 1, 237.

misbeliefs in science, imperfect views of theology, and conventions of political tyranny, so there had come down things worse, in the forms of cobwebbed sacramentalisms and sanctities for private life, factitious restrictions of individual liberty pretending themselves to be Christian rules of holiness . . . [Milton] did not believe that the world had arrived at a final and perfect system of morals, any more than at a perfect system of science. He believed the established ethical customs of men to be subject to revision by enlarged and progressive reason, and modifiable from age to age, equally with their theories of cosmology, their philosophical creeds, or anything else . . . Of a tendency to this state of feeling Milton had given evidences of early youth; but I do not think I am wrong in fixing on the year 1643 as the time when it became chronic, nor in tracing the sudden enlargement of it then beyond its former bounds to the wrench in his life caused by his unhappy marriage.¹⁹

Milton, eventually, would clear away every imaginary sin by accepting an antinomianism that does not come fully into view until *De Doctrina Christiana*. More than twenty years on, he writes of the abolition of the entire written law — of the abrogation even of the Decalogue; in its place, the ‘better law of faith . . . inscribed on believers’ hearts.’²⁰

Michael tells Adam in *Paradise Lost* of the spiritual adulthood purchased by Christ’s sacrifice. The angel speaks of a ‘better covenant,’ a movement

From imposition of strict laws, to free
Acceptance of large grace, from servile fear
To filial, to work of law to works of faith. (12.304-6)

If Masson is right to settle on 1643 as the formative year — and I believe he is; the comparison to scientific progress is especially fine²¹ — is it possible to account for Milton’s declining taste for ‘the axle of discipline’ (*CPW* 1.750), and his budding sense that man should read Scripture by the light of his heart? One way of understanding what happens is to recognize that he radically recasts the domain that we identified, earlier, as the ‘part of the Temple which is not measur’d.’ So far from holding only detritus cast beyond the pale of divine attention, this area turns out, in *The Doctrine and Discipline of*

¹⁹ Masson, *Life* (1880), Vol. 3, 73-74.

²⁰ See *CPW* 6.639, 6.531-32.

²¹ In the opening chapter of *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, Milton promises ‘to perfect such *Prutenick* tables as shall mend the *Astronomy* of our wide expositors.’ *Prutenick* refers to the work of Erasmus Reinhold, in the *Tabulae Prutenicae*, which presented the most accurate calculations yet of the movements of the planets. The ‘wide expositors’ — ‘wide,’ that is, mistaken (‘wide of the mark’) — are men who prop up an incorrect interpretation of marriage law in England. They would save ‘the *Phaenomenon* of our Saviours answer to the Pharises about the matter’ (*CPW* 2.243).

Divorce and Areopagitica, to be the primary arena of human choice — exciting and important, where all the action is. It is made subject to a drama of faith and the will; for the prized section in our picture from the Book of Revelation, on the other hand, there is considerably less enthusiasm. We shall see in the next section that Milton is beginning to set the groundwork for what he defines, in *De Doctrina*, as ‘Christian Liberty.’ Studying the territory unmarked by God, he will learn how ‘Christ our liberator frees us from the slavery of sin and thus from the rule of the law and of men’ (CPW 6.537).

The anti-episcopal tracts emphasize ‘Gods appointment’ and rules gathered from Scripture partly because of the serious doubts they raise about ecclesiastical structures reared by men. In *The Reason of Church-Government*, Milton jeers at the ‘wretched projectors’ who ‘bescraull their Pamflets every day with new formes of government for our Church’ (CPW 1.753). More to the point is his refusal of the position advanced by the likes of Richard Hooker, who allows the use of reason and natural law, beyond the Bible, in decisions about worship and clerical government.²² None of us, on Milton’s view, is able to make such judgments. Even in Heaven, it is not so:

Yea also the Angels themselves, in whom no disorder is fear’d . . . are distinguisht and quaterniond into their celestiall Princedomes, and Satrapies, according as God himselfe hath writ his imperiall decrees through the great provinces of heav’n. The state also of the blessed in Paradise, though never so perfect, is not therefore left without discipline, whose golden survaying reed marks out and measures every quarter and circuit of the new Jerusalem. Yet is it not to be conceiv’d that those eternall effluences of sanctity and love in the glorified Saints should by this meanes be confin’d and cloy’d with repetition of that which is prescrib’d, but that our happinesse may orbe it selfe into a thousand vagancies of glory and delight, and with a kinde of eccentricall equation be as it were an invariable Planet of joy and felicity, how much lesse can we believe that God would leave his fraile and feeble, though not lesse beloved Church here below to the perpetuall stumble of conjecture and disturbance in this our darke voyage without the carde and compasse of Discipline. (CPW 1.752-53)

Readers who wish to include Milton among the devils’ party will find early support for their view in this portrayal of the blessed, ‘confin’d and cloy’d’ in Paradise ‘with repetition of that which is prescrib’d.’ *Cloy’d* is especially unsettling; the word comes into English from the French *clouer*, ‘to nail.’ For mankind, after the Fall, the case is

²² One formulation of the argument appears in the third book of Hooker’s *Of the Lawes of Ecclesiastical Politie* (Books 1-4, London, 1593).

quite otherwise. Amid the tornadoed Atlantic of our being, we set forth like the moon in ‘Il Penseroso,’ as ‘one that had been led astray / Through the heaven’s wide pathless way’ (69-70). Kepler, when he saw that the planets veered from perfectly circular paths in their journeys around the sun, adjusted his equations to account for these deviations. The dips and variegations in the courses of our own lives are accountable, similarly, to what Milton calls ‘a kinde of eccentricall equation.’²³ A Church built according to God’s specifications is important because it serves as a beacon, a ‘carde and compasse.’ It helps each of us, through the ‘perpetuall stumble of conjecture and disturbance,’ to stride across the oxymoron of ‘invariable Planet’: to be a πλανήτης, a wanderer, yet with movements made sure by the ‘pure, and living precept of Gods word’ (CPW 1.652).

It is with some relish that Milton lists, in *The Reason of Church-Government*, the qualifications required of a leader who would guide men in the affairs of the world. He must be a ‘true knower of himselfe,’ rare in ‘contemplation and practice, wit, prudence, fortitude, and eloquence’; must ‘comprehend the hidden causes of things, and span in his thoughts all the various effects that passion or complexion can worke in mans nature’; he must scorn self-reward and possess in his heart ‘all vertues heroick’ (CPW 1.753). As we pause to reflect on the extraordinary suitability of Milton himself, under these terms, let us also take account of the revised job description that appears at the start of *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*:

I will now utter a doctrine, if ever any other, though neglected or not understood, yet of great and powerfull importance to the governing of mankind. He who would wisely restrain the reasonable Soul of man within due bounds, must first himself know perfectly, how far the territory and dominion extends of just and honest liberty. As little must he offer to bind that which God hath loos’n’d, as to loos’n that which he hath bound. (CPW 2.227)

The discussion now turns to the underpinnings of this new principle. We leave behind Milton’s earlier work by recalling the remark from John Chrysostom’s *Homilies* that he paraphrases in the commonplace book. ‘A good man by some reckoning seems to pass

²³ The term ‘eccentric’ was used originally to refer to the correction of certain irregularities in the Ptolemaic system by putting the earth slightly off-centre (ἐκ + κέντρον).

the angels, to the extent that, enclosed in a weak and earthly body and always struggling with his passions, he nevertheless aspires to lead a life like the inhabitants of heaven.²⁴

The poet of *Paradise Lost* comes more and more to value the dynamic virtue privileged by this description. He expands the scope of the individual *arbitrium*, and, ‘in this our darke voyage,’ we sail in the wind’s eye.

II.

Near the end of the infernal council in Book 2 of *Paradise Lost*, Beelzebub rises from his seat to deaden any thought of a truce with Heaven. The work is done before his speech begins. Satan’s deputy approaches the assembly with ‘grave / Aspect’ (300-1) and shoulders prepared for the ‘weight of mightiest monarchies’ (307). We know already that this pillar of state will never be softened by time’s current. Mammon’s promise of cooler fire is risible, for a moment, and then it is forgotten. Beelzebub explains that the course before the devils is as predictable and as necessary as the rebound of a physical object. Add up all the variables — the rebels’ ethereal birthright, their constitutional inability ever to accept the servitude of divine worship, the iron sceptre that rules over them in Hell — and only one path remains. They may sit and talk of a kingdom built from the crooked shapes of woe, but it is a foolish dream, for in the end the devils will always rebel. Just before Beelzebub starts his address, Milton writes that the assembly has become as ‘still as night / Or summer’s noontide air’ (2.307-09). The defeated faction has no choice, Beelzebub is saying, but to become a ‘pestilence that walketh in darkness,’ ‘the destruction that wasteth at noontide’ (Psalm 91:6).

This, we may say, is partly God’s fault. At a diplomatic summit between Hell and Heaven, neither party would be prepared to work towards a settlement. It is true that the devils are a foul bunch with whom to negotiate. Their offer is for ‘hostility,’ ‘hate,’ ‘untamed reluctance,’ and ‘revenge though slow’ (2.336-37). Yet God is ready to salt the wound. From Him, Beelzebub expects slavery: ‘custody severe,’ he says, ‘and

²⁴ CPW 1.364; the editor, Ruth Mohl, dates the entry between 1639 and 1641.

stripes, and arbitrary punishment / Inflicted' (2.333-35). To modern readers, *arbitrary* sounds like a curious choice. Even Patrick Hume, in 1695, felt it necessary to gloss the adjective: 'arbitrary punishment' means 'according to the Will of our angry Conqueror,' from '*Arbitrarius*, Lat. Voluntary, left to the Will of another.'²⁵ At first, this does not seem like much of a reproach. All of God's actions are arbitrary in the root sense of *arbitrarius*, which comes from the Latin verb *arbitrari*, 'to decide' or 'to judge.' As Beelzebub acknowledges a few lines later, the Father is the 'high arbitrator' (2.359) of Heaven, a Being of boundless freedom. For Satan's deputy, however, 'arbitrary' carries an additional force, one that Samuel Johnson identifies with characteristic precision in his *Dictionary*. Johnson writes that 'arbitrary' refers to a person or a thing unburdened by law, 'following the will without restraint.' It suggests a volition that is non-legal, divorced from reason or rule, and therefore capricious, erratic; since an arbitrary action is governed by nothing other than the *arbitrium*, the individual will, it is necessarily unpredictable.²⁶ What Beelzebub means when he complains of 'arbitrary punishment' is that God's penalties are meted out as unfairly as his promotions. From a Creator who has violated the angelic ranks by elevating an 'equal above equals,' the devils can expect further injustice. There is no use in pursuing the 'hard liberty' (2.256) and 'settled state / Of order' (2.279-80) recommended by Mammon, if God wills whatever He wants. Against an adversary whose *arbitrium* is unrestrained, it is impossible to choose responsibly. No course is left but a commensurate, 'untamed reluctance' (2.337): resistance without bounds.

'Arbitrary' carries a particular political resonance. It is no surprise to find

²⁵ Hume, *Annotations* (1695), 64.

²⁶ Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, Vol. 1 (London, 1755). Hume, in the *Annotations* (1695), makes a similar observation in his note on 'arbitrary punishment': 'The Civilians,' he writes, 'distinguish between *Arbitrium* and *Arbitrarium* thus; *Arbitrium, est sententia, ex arbitrio & bona fide lata; Arbitrarium quod in arbitris potestate est pro arbitrio judicioque suo statuere*' (64).

‘despotic’ among the synonyms Johnson lists in the *Dictionary*.²⁷ The word, indeed, frequently appears in pamphlets that criticize the abuses of government. In 1646, the Leveller Richard Overton writes from a cell at Newgate to complain of the ‘Arbitrary designes,’ the ‘arbitrary domination’ and ‘Arbitrary venome’ of the House of Lords. With ‘misterious mischievous subtilty,’ these men ‘have driven on their wicked designes of tyranny and Arbitrary domination, under the fair, specious, and deceitfull pretences of Liberty and Freedom.’²⁸ John Locke uses the adjective again and again in a negative sense. Central to the argument of the *Second Treatise of Government* is his refusal of contractarian defences of absolutism. No individual can ever cede ‘Arbitrary Power’ to another; the authority of a legislative body ‘is *not*, nor can possibly be absolutely *Arbitrary*, over the Lives and Fortunes of the People.’²⁹ Milton is fond of the word, too, and it appears often in his assessments of Charles I. In *Eikonoklastes*, he complains of the king’s ‘arbitrary violences in time of Peace’ (CPW 3.345), of the ‘arbitrary wilfulness, and tyrannical Designes’ (CPW 3.397) of a ruler who will never accept the authority of Parliament. Like the prelates, accused by Milton in *An Apology against a Pamphlet* of ‘erecting . . . an arbitrary sway according to privat will’ (CPW 1.946), the king has affected a ‘reducement of law to arbitrary power’ (CPW 3.438). A year earlier, Charles had replied in kind to such charges. In *Eikon Basilike*, he chastises men ‘so tender’ of ‘being subject to Arbitrary Government (that is, the Law of anothers will, to which themselves give no consent)’ that they would deprive the king of his own power of decision. No more than any other Englishman should he be forced to sign over reason

²⁷ This sense also appears under the fourth entry for the adjective in the *OED*. ‘Arbitrary’ means ‘unrestrained in the exercise of will; of uncontrolled power or authority, absolute; hence, despotic, tyrannical.’

²⁸ Richard Overton, *A defiance against all arbitrary usurpations or encroachments* (London, 1646), 2-3.

²⁹ John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (1690), 2 § 135, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge, 1988), 357. It is possible, however, to find thinkers defending a consensual view of slavery; for examples, see Richard Tuck, *Natural Rights Theories* (Cambridge, 1979), 49 ff.

to a 'tumultuary patrones,' and 'consent to what ever . . . Parliament shall require.'³⁰

Beelzebub's charge of 'arbitrary punishment' sounds, in this context, like the sort of complaint that receives vigorous nods of approval from William Empson.³¹ Reading Beelzebub's speech in *Paradise Lost*, it is difficult not to be reminded of Milton's unforgiving remarks about the 'arbitrary violence' (CPW 3.345) of Charles I. One feels the pressure of a comparison between the poet's approval of an 'unblameable exorbitancy' and 'irregular motions' (CPW 3.562) against the king, and the desperate conquest to bruise a Creator who offers only slavery. What should such fellows as Beelzebub do? Calvin would answer by saying that we are looking at the situation askance. The comparison between a human king and the king of kings assumes, mistakenly, that both rulers must act in a way that accords with our ideas about righteousness and justice. Unlike Hooker, who famously argues that 'the being of God is a kind of law to his working,'³² Calvin holds that divine action is prior to ethics. 'The will of God is so the supreme rule of righteousness, so that whatsoever he willeth, even for this that he willeth it, it ought to be taken for righteous.'³³ Milton appears

³⁰ Charles I, *Eikon Basilike* (1648), ed. Philip A. Knachel (Ithaca, NY, 1966), 25-26. In *Eikonoklastes*, Milton accuses Charles of plagiarism and dissembling: 'Had he borrow'd *David's* heart, it had bin much the holier theft' (CPW 3.547). Real doubts about the authorship of the book were raised four decades later, when a note in the third Earl of Anglesey's copy was found to attribute *Eikon Basilike* to John Gauden, Bishop of Exeter. See F.F. Madan, *A New Bibliography of the Eikon Basilike of King Charles the First* (London, 1950), who observes that the Anglesey note was pasted into some copies of the 1690 edition of *Eikonoklastes*.

³¹ See, especially, William Empson, *Milton's God* (London, 1961). Similarly, Walter Raleigh, in *Milton* (1900), writes of the God of *Paradise Lost* as 'whimsical Tyrant, all of whose laws are arbitrary & occasional' (129).

³² Richard Hooker, *Laws* 1.2, in the *Folger Works*, ed. Georges Edelen (Cambridge, MA, 1977), Vol. 1, 59. The assertion of reason or law behind God's actions is often twisted towards divine determinism by thinkers like Calvin. Hooker anticipates the move, and takes pains to avoid diminishing Heaven's liberty. ('Nor is the freedom of the will of God any way abated, let or hindered by means of this, because the imposition of this law up on himself is his own free and voluntary act,' 62-63.) Hooker is also ready to say that man, being of 'feeble braine,' may not understand the law that governs divine action. Still: 'they erre . . . who thinke that of the will of God to do this or that, there is no reason besides his will' (61).

³³ Jean Calvin, *The Institution of the Christian Religion*, 3.23.2, trans. Thomas Norton (London, 1599), 257. Calvin draws from Augustine's *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, 1.10.3, to take a firm stance towards the question that appears in the *Euthyphro*: 'Is that which is holy loved by the gods because it is holy, or

sympathetic to this position in *De Doctrina*, where he writes that we should ‘disregard reason when discussing sacred matters and follow exclusively what the Bible teaches’ (CPW 6.213). More often, however, he muddies the issue, either marrying right reason to God’s will, or plainly hedging his bets. His own wobbling is given voice by the Chorus of *Samson Agonistes*, when it considers the promptings from Heaven that push the Nazarite to wed a gentile. An imperative (‘Down Reason then’) is qualified to such an extent that it becomes non-committal: ‘Down Reason then, at least vain reasonings down, / Though Reason here aver / That moral verdict quits her of unclean’ (322-24).

The impositions of men are the subject of *Areopagitica*. Milton entreats Parliament to steer England away from the sort of behaviour that invites Beelzebub’s complaint. A government that is ‘oppressive, arbitrary, and tyrannous,’ he says, nurtures citizens who cannot love virtue. They become ‘brutish, formall and slavish’ (CPW 2.559), ignorant of anything beyond themselves. The Parliamentary *imprimatur* encourages nothing more than an ‘obedient unanimity’ (CPW 2.545), the ‘forc’t and outward union of cold, and neutrall, and inwardly divided minds’ (CPW 2.551) that becomes the trademark of Milton’s devils. The solution to the problem is simple. Swap one kind of arbitrary conduct for another:

For books are as meats and viands are; some of good, some of evill substance; and yet God in that unapocryphall vision, said without exception, Rise *Peter*, kill and eat, leaving the choice to each mans discretion . . . I conceive therefore, that when God did enlarge the universall diet of mans body, saving ever the rules of temperance, he then also, as before, left arbitrary the dyeting and repasting of our minds; as wherein every mature man might have to exercise his own leading capacity. How great a virtue is temperance, how much of moment through the whole life of man? yet God commits the managing of so great a trust, without particular Law of prescription, wholly to the demeanour of every grown man. (CPW 2.513)

Milton enlists the abrogation of Jewish dietary law to support his suggestion that regulation of the press does injury to man’s postlapsarian moral stature. Christ eliminates the distinction between clean and unclean meat. Peter, in Acts 10, is given leave to taste the flesh of any creature. A reader’s decisions are to be carried out with

is it holy because it is loved by the gods?’ (10a). The famous discussion of the problem appears at 10a-11b; I refer to Harold North Fowler’s translation in the Loeb ed. (New York, 1914), 37-41.

similar freedom. To the course of a man's study, Milton applies Paul's dictum: 'let him that eateth despise not him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth' (Romans 14:3). He substitutes the 'arbitrary' thumb of the censor for the authority of the individual over choices 'left arbitrary' by God. Governmental licensing depresses a man's own *arbitrium*, Milton is suggesting. He argues for a choice in books that is unrestrained by judicial proscription.³⁴

At a memorable moment in the *Second Treatise*, Locke remarks that a person is 'in a much worse condition who is exposed to the Arbitrary Power of one Man, who has the command of 100000. than he that is expos'd to the Arbitrary Power of 100000. single Men.'³⁵ The terms of Milton's exchange are much more appealing. He insists on the distribution, to individuals, of the authority held by the licensing office, but the 'arbitrary . . . dyeting and repasting' he recommends is not exempt from rule. The poet does not suggest that the intellect should sup without moderation or the safeguard of reason. Our decisions, indeed, should *not* be what Traherne calls 'Arbitrary (in a loose Construction).'³⁶ The choice of books is non-legal, distant from God's *arbitrium*, in the sense that the Scriptures furnish no specific decree in this matter. What counts is that the decision be made temperately, *bono animo et simplice corde*, as Augustine puts it.³⁷ To 'a discreet and judicious reader,' even 'bad books . . . serve in many respects to discover, to confute, to forewarn, and to illustrate' (*CPW* 2.512).

If the 'arbitrary' of capricious and absolute rule may be traded for the 'arbitrary' of personal liberty and reason, it is also possible for the bargain to move in the other

³⁴ Milton places some boundaries on a reader's jurisdiction, as when, for example, he restricts writing in support of Rome. See John Illo, 'The Misreading of Milton,' in *Radical Perspectives in the Arts*, ed. Lee Baxandall (Harmondsworth, 1972), 178-92, which considers the argument of *Areopagitica* in light of these qualifications.

³⁵ Locke, *Two Treatises*, 2 § 137 (ed., 1988), 359-60. What Locke means is that no man would leave the state of nature willingly, if he were able to anticipate his subjection to a despot; lawless authority divided among all men is preferable to the consolidation of rule under one leader.

³⁶ Thomas Traherne, *Christian Ethicks* (1675), ed. Carol L. Marks and George R. Guffey (Ithaca, NY, 1968), 98.

³⁷ Augustine, *De sermone domini in monte* 2.18, in *PCC* Vol. 34, Col. 1296.

direction. Step off the right path — allow passion to engulf the senses, the will to govern without restraint — and God is liable to take away the freedom He has leased to the individual. The balance may shift back towards the subjection of a tyrant's 'arbitrary power'; the 'general good and safety,' once more, may 'depend upon the privat and overweening Reason of one obstinat Man; who against all the Kingdom, if he list, will interpret both the Law and his Oath of Coronation by the tenor of his own will' (*CPW* 3.416). The exchange moves in reverse in Book 12 of *Paradise Lost*, when Adam views the work of Nimrod for the first time. He reacts with horror at the 'dominion unreserved' (12.27) exercised by the architect of Babel:

Oh execrable son so to aspire
Above his brethren, to himself assuming
Authority usurped, from God not given:
He gave us only over beast, fish, fowl
Dominion absolute; that right we hold
By his donation; but man over men
He made not lord; such title to himself
Reserving, human left human free. (12.64-71)

In his reply, Michael corrects the allocation of responsibility implicit in Adam's outcry. Nimrod is a proud man, and blameworthy, the angel says, but the fault for his success lies with men who have violated the law of nature by casting aside reason for 'inordinate desires / And upstart passions' (12.87-88). In this state of affairs, 'tyranny must be':

Therefore since he permits
Within himself unworthy powers to reign
Over free reason, God in judgment just
Subjects him from without to violent lords:
Who oft as undeservedly enthrall
His outward freedom. (12.90-95)

Michael leaves Adam with the smarting thought of the Creator Himself working to exact the penalty for intemperance. The rule of passion, he suggests, does not only steal away a man's liberty over himself, his ability to make wise choices about what has been left for him to decide. Instead, 'when Nations . . . decline so low / From virtue,' when 'sins / National interrupt their public peace,' God stirs up enemies, nurtures tyrants. He

‘deprives [men] of their outward liberty / Their inward lost.’³⁸

The exchange is of particular interest to Milton because it explains the state of marriage law in England. The main authority for strict rules against divorce is Christ’s speech to the Pharisees in the Gospel of Matthew:

The Pharisees came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? / And he answered, and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning male and female, / And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? / Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. / They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? / He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. / And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.
(Matthew 19:3-9)

Legislators, Milton argues, have forgotten that the audience for these words is as sorry as the population of Babel. As for Nimrod’s followers, these new burdens are earned by repeated insults to liberty. The Pharisees are subjected to harder laws after they have abused the freedom in marriage set out for them by Moses. Their mistake is what Milton calls ‘extravagance’ — a wandering away from the sanctifying behaviour that is expected by God. Why else would the Son, whose business it is to abrogate the law, add restrictions to the life of man? (‘Was it to shame *Moses*?’) The intent is ‘to bridle those erroneous and licentious postillers’: ‘as the offence was in one extreme, so the rebuke’ (*CPW* 2.668).

Christ’s design, in all of this, is temperance. With an ‘excessive restraint,’ He pressures the Pharisees in order to bring them to rectitude and mediocrity. The method is similar to what we do to a warped piece of wood; we bow it the other way, ‘that

³⁸ *PL* 12.316-17, 100-1. God’s involvement in the erasure of freedom is the subject of a series of remarks by Rogers, *The Matter of Revolution* (1996), 161-76, who carefully adjudicates Milton’s contradictions on this point. Surely Barbara K. Lewalski’s description of the discussion that begins Book 12 is not strong enough: ‘Michael . . . explains that political tyranny has its roots in the loss of true government over the self caused by Adam’s sin,’ for ‘personal and political morality are inseparable.’ Lewalski, *Paradise Lost and the Rhetoric of Literary Forms* (Princeton, 1986), 262. This is the position of *Paradise Regained*, in which the Son says that the tribes of Israel ‘wrought their own captivity’ (3.415), and blames the tyranny of Sejanus on a people ‘by themselves enslaved’ (4.133). The God of *Paradise Lost* actively moves the bargain along. Subjection is *His* punishment for intemperance.

overbending might reduce it to a straightnesse by its own reluctance' (CPW 2.668).

Milton uses a favourite image, of Christ as a physician, to explain the new restrictions. The Son of God administers to the Pharisees 'a sharp & corrosive sentence against a foul and putrid license; not to eate into the flesh, but into the sore.' The strategy is published in the heading that opens the second book of *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*. It is 'excesse cur'd by contrary excess':

Where the Pharises were strict, there Christ seems remisse; where they were too remisse, he saw it needful to seem most severe . . . So heer he may be justly thought to have giv'n this rigid sentence against divorce, not to cut off all remedy from a good man who finds himself consuming away in a disconsolate and uninjoy'd matrimony, but to lay a bridle upon the bold abuses of those overweening *Rabbies*; which he could not more effectually doe, then by a countersway of restraint, curbing their exorbitance almost into the other extreme.³⁹

In *Tetrachordon*, Milton speculates about the crimes that earned Christ's rigour. His suspicion is that the Pharisees defended Herod when he expelled his wife, and wed a niece who was already married to his half-brother. 'No wonder then if the sentence of our Saviour sounded stricter then his custome was' (CPW 2.645).

We perceive how far Milton has come from the guidelines for interpreting the Bible that he lays down in the anti-episcopal pamphlets. To the laws given by Christ, he adds an awareness of origins, an aetiology, which he uses to show that their strictness no longer has any great hold. 'What Christ intends to speake here of divorce, will be rather the forbidding of what we may not doe herein passionately and abusively . . . then the discussing of what herein we may doe reasonably and necessarily' (CPW 2.645). The principle is available for broad application. 'Christ in teaching meant not always to be tak'n word for word' (CPW 2.745).

It is fair to ask how a person is supposed to know which ones are the 'many instances' (CPW 2.282) in Scripture where the Son speaks excessively. The answer that emerges with gathering force in the writing of this period is that one tells by listening to 'the now-only lawgiving mouth of charity' (CPW 2.669). Critics have charged with

³⁹ CPW 2.281-83. In Chapter 4, I discuss the two versions of 'excess' in Milton's poem 'Upon the Circumcision.'

some justice that this means listening to Milton, as charity's ventriloquist. Jonathan Swift was trotting out a familiar complaint when he wrote that the poet cried foul of marriage 'because he had a Shrew for his Wife.'⁴⁰ Such accusations, however, draw attention away from the genuine concern in these works for what Milton, citing Jeremiah, calls 'the law of Christ . . . writt'n in our hearts.' Throughout his life, he remains fascinated by the simplicity of the covenant:

Our Saviours doctrine is, that the end, and the fulfilling of every command is charity; no faith without it, no truth without it, no workes pleasing to God . . . Therefore it is that the most of evangelick precepts are given us in proverbiall formes, to drive us from the letter, though we love ever to be sticking there. For no other cause did Christ assure us that whatsoever things we binde, or slacken on earth, are so in heaven, but to signifie that the christian arbitrement of charity is supreme decider of all controversie, and supreme resolver of all scripture. (CPW 2.637)

Thomas Hardy, for an epigraph to *Jude the Obscure*, borrowed a sentence from *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* in which the verdict of this 'christian arbitrement' is announced.⁴¹ 'Who so prefers either Matrimony, or other Ordinance before the good of man and the plain exigence of charity, let him professe Papist, or Protestant, or what he wil, he is no better then a Pharise, and understands not the gospel' (CPW 2.223).

Milton's position on divorce is straightforward, and the cases that interest him are not grand or unusual. Two persons who contract a marriage decide whether it provides them with comfort and solace. If it does not, the union may be dissolved and they are free to try again. A man called to marry, especially if he is callow, often fails to

⁴⁰ Jonathan Swift, *The Prose Works*, ed. Herbert Davis et al. (Oxford, 1957), Vol. 2, 67. In *Areopagitica*, the printing ordinance of 14 June 1643 clearly stands behind Milton's plea for 'a little generous prudence, a little forbearance of one another, and some grain of charity' (CPW 2.554). Yet a brave commitment to this view of Scripture is still to be found in *A Treatise of Civil Power*, fifteen years later. 'Seeing therefore that no man, no synod, no session of men . . . can judge definitively the sense of scripture to another mans conscience . . . it follows planely, that he who holds in religion that beleef or those opinions which to his conscience and utmost understanding appeer with most evidence or probabilitie in the scripture, though to others he seem erroneous, can no more be justly censur'd for a heretic then his censurers' (CPW 7.247-49).

⁴¹ In Part IV, 'At Shaston.' In a preface added to the novel sixteen years after its first printing, Hardy sets out a view of divorce that is similar to Milton's. 'A marriage should be dissolvable as soon as it becomes a cruelty to either of the parties — being then essentially and morally no marriage.' See Hardy, *Jude the Obscure* (New York, 2001), xxviii.

recognize the woman who can support him through the world's crowded dance. The union brings an 'unspeakable warisomenes & despaire of all social delight.' Friends try to reconcile them; couples with exceptional patience persevere; yet 'where love cannot be, there can be left of wedlock nothing, but the empty husk of an outside matrimony.'⁴²

The unnamed author of the *Answer* to the first divorce pamphlet worries about the behaviour that will follow if divorce becomes too easy. 'Who sees not, how many thousands of lustfull and libidinous men would be parting from their Wives every week and marrying others.'⁴³ This representation of Milton's position is not entirely fair. In the final pages of *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, he describes the formal process of separation, which requires a minister and 'other grave selected Elders,' as well as a declaration from the husband that his case is 'not contain'd in that prohibition of divorce, which Christ pronounc't' (CPW 2.353). (The procedure is a playing out, in reverse, of the trial that earns Adam a companion in *Paradise Lost*.) In *Tetrachordon*, however, Milton acknowledges the likelihood of abuse. There will be Englishmen who put away their wives 'in a violent and harsh manner,' or 'without any reason' (CPW 2.645). He replies to anxieties about divorces 'arbitrarily given by the disliking husband' — I borrow the phrase from Milton's old antagonist, Joseph Hall⁴⁴ — by

⁴² CPW 2.256. Besides a few 'particular exceptions' (CPW 2.589), Milton is interested in the suffering of husbands, and has little to say about wives or children. Moreover, despite a frequent insistence that the causes of divorce are rooted in nature, Stephen Fallon is right that Milton 'has difficulty keeping culpable and non-culpable imperfection separate.' See Fallon, 'The Spur of Self-Concernment,' *MS* 38 (2000), 228. References to women who reel in husbands with snares and alluring ordinances are not difficult to find, and there is a rather horrifying passage in *Tetrachordon* in which Milton describes a husband tied up, 'a faultlesse person, like a parricide, as it were into one sack with an enemy, to be his causelesse tormenter and executioner the length of a long life' (CPW 2.677). According to Fallon, Milton realises that his view of divorce requires him to argue from a position of fallenness, but he resists acknowledging morally neutral weaknesses for fear that he will have to count himself among the imperfect mass of men. I return to the problems with Milton's view of nature in the last part of this chapter.

⁴³ *An Answer to a Book, intituled The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* (London, 1644), 5. William Prynne wrote after the publication of *The Doctrine and Discipline* that he observed a 'dangerous increase of . . . divorce at pleasure'; see Prynne, *Twelve considerable serious questions touching church government* (London, 1644), 7. Milton replies in *Colasterion*: 'a jolly slander' (CPW 2.722).

⁴⁴ *The Works of the Right Reverend Joseph Hall*, ed. Philip Wynter (Oxford, 1863), Vol. 7, 371. Hall is writing of *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, a 'licentious pamphlet thrown abroad in these lawless times.' He claims to have thought it the work of 'some great wit meant to try his skill' until it

expressing his own concern at behaviour in the *status quo* that follows from an ‘absolute prohibition’ (CPW 2.748). Reform makes possible the worthwhile ‘arbitrary,’ the one that refers, as in *Areopagitica*, to a movement away from unreasonable restrictions:

This sensitive and materious cause alone can no more hinder a divorce against those higher and more human reasons urging it, then it can alone without them to warrant a copulation, but leaves it arbitrary to those who in their chance of marriage finde not why divorce is forbidd them, but why it is permitted them. (CPW 2.649)

Pragmatically, Milton adds that governments are not very good at writing legislation which prevents only injurious separations. When malice is involved, there are ‘ten thousand injuries,’ ‘bitter actions of despight too subtle and too unapparent for Law to deal with’ (CPW 2.632). The motive for dissolution is often lust, but ‘lust it may as frequently not be . . . whether it be or not, the law cannot discern’ (CPW 2.646).

A second edition of *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* appeared in 1644, six months after the first printing. Among its many enlargements is a long preface which Milton uses to propose the wholesale removal of custom from our dealings with Heaven. He writes to Parliament of ‘inveterate blots and obscurities’ (CPW 2.224) and advises a clearing away of empty precepts, traditions, human innovations. The resemblance to the recommendation of the anti-episcopal writings is plain. Milton calls attention to it in a courageous passage:

The greatest burden in the world is superstition; not onely of Ceremonies in the Church, but of imaginary and scarcrow sins at home. What greater weakning, what more subtle stratagem against our Christian warfare, when besides the grosse body of real transgressions to encounter; wee shall bee terrify’d by a vain and shadowy menacing of faults that are not: When things indifferent shall be set to over-front us, under banners of sin, what wonder if we bee routed, and by this art of our Adversary, fall into the subjection of worst and deadliest offences. (CPW 2.228)

A new representation of divine ordinance is taking hold in these pamphlets. Milton starts to see Scripture as a dialogue see-sawing between God and man, responsive, complicated, and authoritative in terms that apply separately to every individual. (‘The waies of the Lord,’ he writes in the new preface to *The Doctrine and Discipline*, are

became clear that the argument was in earnest.

‘measur’d out to the proportion of each mind and spirit, each temper and disposition, created so different each from other, yet by skill of wise conducting, all to become uniform in virtue.’) Moreover, the unrubbing that serves in the earlier work to clarify divine instruction now has as its end the provision of a realm of decisions available to men. Milton releases ‘honest liberties from unworthy bondage’ and denounces the ‘peevish madnesse among men against their own freedom.’ Like Saint Paul, his great predecessor in this area, who warns of a man ‘intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind’ (Colossians 2:18), Milton cuts away law that ‘puffs up unhealthily’ (CPW 2.223). He cleans the Augean stables.⁴⁵

When Milton writes of ‘things indifferent . . . set to over-front us, under banners of sin,’ or of ‘a civil, an indifferent, a sometime diswaded Law of mariage’ (CPW 2.228-29), he is referring to an argument with roots in the Stoic concept of ἀδιάφορα, or ‘indifferent things’ (the word comes from the Greek verb διαφέρειν, ‘to differ’).⁴⁶ It will be helpful to review the history of the doctrine. The Stoics hold virtue to be a necessary and sufficient condition for happiness (εὐδαιμονία). On their view, only moral goods are intrinsically desirable, since they alone contribute to the life of virtue.⁴⁷ It is evident nonetheless that men seek out certain things, like health and friendship, that are not virtuous in themselves. The Stoics make provision for these non-moral ends by identifying them as ‘indifferents’ (ἀδιάφορα):

⁴⁵ The analogy appears in *Colasterion*; see CPW 2.756.

⁴⁶ It is useful to preface this discussion by noting the association between ‘arbitrary’ and ‘indifferent’ choices in seventeenth-century writing. Donne combines the terms when he discusses the progress of Puritanism: ‘greater matters then are now thought *fundamentall*,’ which ‘were then but indifferent, and arbitrary.’ Describing marriage — and offering a view very different from Milton’s — he maintains that marriage is *not* ‘an indifferent, an arbitrary thing.’ Donne, however, is thinking of the union of a clergyman and his flock. See the *Sermons* (1953-62), Vol. 10, 175, and Vol. 6, 82. Samuel Clarke’s treatise on Christian liberty begins by considering things ‘intrinsically indifferent . . . left free and arbitrary, so that they may either be done or not.’ See Clarke, *Of scandal: together with a consideration of the nature of Christian liberty and things indifferent* (London, 1680), 42. ‘Indifferent’ and ‘arbitrary’ are also related by Francis Mason, *The Authoritie of the Church in making Canons and Constitutions concerning things indifferent* (London, 1607), 5.

⁴⁷ See the superb discussion in Glenn Lesses, ‘Virtue and the Goods of Fortune in Stoic Moral Theory,’ *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, Vol. 7, ed. Julia Annas (Oxford, 1989), 95-127.

Such things (as life, health, and pleasure) are not in themselves goods but are morally indifferent, though falling under the species or subdivision 'things preferred.' For as the property of hot is to warm, not to cool, so the property of good is to benefit, not to injure; but wealth and health do not more benefit than injury, therefore neither wealth nor health is good. Further, they say that that is not good of which both good and bad use can be made; but of wealth and health both good and bad use can be made; therefore wealth and health are not goods.⁴⁸

Diogenes Laertius identifies two classes of indifferents. In one group are things that stir no 'inclination or aversion' in a man. Suppose you know you have an even number of hairs on your head. This piece of information, Diogenes says, is likely to have no effect on you.⁴⁹ The world is also full of indifferents of another sort, what he calls 'things preferred' (προηγμένα) and 'things rejected' (ἀποπροηγμένα). A woman wishes for reputation, or riches; she would avoid disease, ugliness, pain. These ends have no intrinsic worth, but may make an incidental and causal contribution to a happy life. Cicero contrasts their value to that of the moral virtues. It is like 'the light of a lamp . . . eclipsed and overpowered by the rays of the sun.' It is 'a drop of honey . . . lost in the vastness of the Aegean Sea.'⁵⁰

The Stoic description of indifferents is taken up by Christian thinkers at least as early as Origen and Clement of Alexandria.⁵¹ As this happens, the definition changes to reflect a moral hierarchy in which all actions are seen with respect to God. Obedience to divine will nudges aside εὐδαιμονία as the highest end of human striving. An ἀδιάφορον comes to be understood as something standing apart from Scriptural proscription. It is an act 'neither . . . commanded nor forbidden' by God.⁵² Christian

⁴⁸ Diogenes Laertius on Zeno, in the *Lives*, 7.106-7, trans. Hicks (1925), Vol. 2, 213.

⁴⁹ Not so, interestingly, for a Christian: see, for instance, Matthew 10:30, or Luke 12:7: 'even the very hairs of your head are all numbered.'

⁵⁰ Cicero, *De finibus bonorum et malorum*, 3.45, trans. H. Rackham, in the Loeb ed. (second ed., New York, NY, 1931), 265.

⁵¹ Paul's use of the concept is controversial. In a recent study, James Jaquette devotes many pages to finding indifferents in Paul's letters, but his description of what he calls an 'adiaphora topos' is not convincing. See Jaquette, *Discerning What Counts* (Atlanta, 1994), 97-196. For a detailed history of the concept, see Bernard Verkamp, *The Indifferent Mean* (Athens, OH, 1977), 18-30.

⁵² Francis Mason, *The Authoritie of the Church* (1607), 7.

writers continue to identify indifferents as elements of the world that contribute nothing to virtue or to vice.⁵³ Their point of reference changes, however. The intrinsic morality of an action comes to depend on divine permission, rather than a philosophical conception of the happy life. The discussion of indifferents turns into a way for believers to account for the revised covenant introduced by Christ. What a man eats, whether or not he has been circumcised: these actions are no longer ruled by God's decree, are not among what Paul calls τὰ διαφέροντα, 'things that matter' (Romans 2:18). Such ἀδιάφορα are subject, instead, to human decision. Calvin points out in the *Institutes* that men 'are bound with no conscience before God of outward things which are by themselves indifferent, but that we may indifferently sometime use them and sometime leave them unused.'⁵⁴ William Tyndale revises the old law by pushing this idea to its logical extreme. 'I may circumcise myself for my pleasure, as well as pare my nails, if I list . . . I may burn the blood and fat of oxen and calves unto this day without sin, as an indifferent thing.'⁵⁵

The formal assertion of a type of freedom may be observed in a treatise on indifferents by George Bishope. Bishope explains that an ἀδιάφορον is 'something that may be done or not done, according to the Liberty and Choice of him that doth them,

⁵³ Edward Bagshaw writes that 'things Indifferent' lie in 'a middle between necessary, as commanded, & unlawful things, as forbidden; morally neither good nor bad in themselves,' but he points out that these categories are not, after all, identical: 'God may by his Sovereignty command what indifferent, or to us seeming inconvenient things in worship, he pleases . . . because he hath power to work Grace by any mean.' *The XXIV cases concerning things indifferent in religious worship considered* (London, 1663), 4-5.

⁵⁴ *The Institution of Christian Religion*, 3.19.7, trans. Norton (1599), 225.

⁵⁵ William Tyndale, *Expositions and notes on sundry portions of the Holy Scriptures*, ed. Henry Walter (Cambridge, 1849), 327, cited in Verkamp, *The Indifferent Mean* (1977), 77. Yet Tony Nuttall reminds me that Tyndale's political thinking anticipates the second argumentative move we shall see in a moment; for he writes that the king in the world governs 'without lawe and may at his owne lust do right and wrong and shall give accounts to God only' — as though politics itself, Nuttall observes, were an ἀδιάφορον. C.S. Lewis cites the sentence from Tyndale's *Obedience of a Christian Man* (London, 1628) in his *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, Excluding Drama* (Oxford, 1954). In this 'strange treatise,' Lewis remarks, Tyndale 'flings . . . appalling power to Henry VIII almost scornfully, like a bone to a dog' (49).

or not doth them. So that if they be done, it imports not any thing of a Necessity; and if they be not done, it implies not any manner of Guilt.’⁵⁶ George Downame reaches the same conclusion. Since ‘Christ hath set us free concerning things indifferent, no man ought to restraine us; and therefore the lawes commanding or forbidding the use of indifferent things are against Christian liberty.’⁵⁷ So, too, Samuel Clarke: ‘What God has left indifferent, and not made necessary, no man has power to make so.’⁵⁸ Milton calls upon this logic himself in *Areopagitica*. At one point the pamphlet drifts from the poet’s deep conviction that Truth will carry victory in a fair fight against Falsehood, and the reader finds him founding toleration on her footspeed, her many forms:

Who knows not that Truth is strong next to the Almighty; she needs no policies, nor stratagems, nor licensings to make her victorious, those are the shifts and the defences that error uses against her power: give her but room, & do not bind her when she sleeps, for then she speaks not true, as the old *Proteus* did, who spake oracles only when he was caught & bound, but then rather she turns herself into all shapes, except her own . . . Yet is it not impossible that she may have more shapes then one. What else is all that rank of things indifferent, wherein Truth may be on this side, or on the other, without being unlike herself. What but a vain shadow else is the abolition of *those ordinances, that hand writing nayl’d to the crosse*, what great purchase is this Christian liberty which *Paul* so often boasts of. His doctrine is, that he who eats or eats not, regards a day, or regards it not, may doe either to the Lord. How many other things might be tolerated in peace, and left to conscience, had we but charity, and were it not the chief strong hold of our hypocrisie to be ever judging one another. (*CPW* 2.563)

The civil *imprimatur*, Milton is saying, lames Truth by resisting her inclination to toe the border between ‘neighboring differences, or rather indifferences’ (*CPW* 2.565). The law furrows with too blunt an edge, keeps ‘truth separated from truth.’ It achieves ‘the fiercest rent and division of all’ (*CPW* 2.546).

The step from indifferents to personal liberty is not self-evident in this period. Serious men stand behind the view that regulatory silence from above licenses human bodies to establish laws at their pleasure. John Williams takes a broadly representative position when he addresses Church practice, which is a common stage for argument on

⁵⁶ George Bishope, *A Little Treatise concerning Things Indifferent* (London, 1663), 3.

⁵⁷ George Downame, *The Christians freedom: wherein is fully expressed the doctrine of Christian libertie* (London, 1635), 127.

⁵⁸ Clarke, *Of scandal* (1680), 54.

this issue. If ‘*Things Indifferent are such as are neither enjoined nor forbidden,*’ he writes, ‘it must follow that things are not unlawful in Divine Worship because they are *not commanded.*’ Indeed, where ‘there is no Institution about these matters . . . it’s no sin for Authority to limit and determin, and for others to be limited, and determined.’⁵⁹

Williams’s claim tests the soundness of the idea that indifferents are closed off to the intrusions of Church or magistrate. It is incorrect, he thinks, to say (as William Bradshaw does) that a man is ‘evill’ who enacts ‘humane lawes that . . . binde men to those things that are confessed indifferent.’⁶⁰ Francis Mason follows an even stronger intuition. In a gloss that takes him far away from a proof-text in I Corinthians, he concludes that ‘the meaning of Gods commandment is, that we should obey the Prince in all things lawfull; but things indifferent, are things lawfull: therefore God commands us to obey our Prince in things indifferent.’⁶¹

Milton is well aware that the doctrine can occupy this form. He protests against it in *An Apology against a Pamphlet*. What use are ‘cruel burdens impos’d not by necessity,’ he asks, and why must men suffer ‘the strange wilfulnesse and wantonnesse of a needlesse and jolly persecuter call’d Indifference’ (CPW 1.925)? The subject is introduced on the first page of the first anti-episcopal treatise. In *Of Reformation*, published in 1641, Milton writes against ‘the new-vomited Paganisme of sensuall Idolatry, attributing purity, or impurity, to things indifferent’ (CPW 1.520). Later, he adds that an unwillingness to ‘assent to things which the Bishops thought *indifferent*’ has forced scores of Englishmen to ‘forsake their dearest home’ for ‘the savage deserts of *America.*’ ‘What more binding then Conscience? what more free then *indifferency?*’ (CPW 2.585).

⁵⁹ John Williams, *A vindication of The case of indifferent things, used in the worship of God* (London, 1684), 4, 52.

⁶⁰ William Bradshaw, *A treatise of the nature and use of things indifferent* (London, 1605), 25. Bradshaw unstintingly defends individual liberty in ἀδιάφορα. At the same time, however, he cuts down the scope of indifferents so much that the category becomes vanishingly small.

⁶¹ Mason, *The Authoritie of the Church* (1607), 31. He is writing about I Corinthians 10:23.

The concept is used to resolve the exegetical impulses at the centre of the divorce argument. Milton is inclined, even before regicide and defeat and *Paradise Lost*, to advise action in the world that is guided by the spirit; he sees Christ cutting away the entire written law and replacing it with the dictates of charity to the human heart. At the same time, he wants to argue that the permission to divorce in Deuteronomy 24:1 is authoritative over the restrictions we have already considered, in the Gospel of Matthew, for instance. This view takes him backwards, away from the new covenant and abrogation and the exactness of faith. Milton addresses the problem by describing the Mosaic law as a statement about indifferents. He calls it a provision that puts decisions about divorce beyond Heavenly decree. The explanation appears in what becomes, in the 1644 edition, the first chapter of *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*. ‘The end of the Lawgiver, and the proper act of the Law,’ Milton writes of the Deuteronomic ordinance, was ‘to command or to allow something just and honest, or indifferent’:

Which being a matter of pure charity, is plainly moral, and more now in force then ever: therefore surely lawful. For if under the Law such was Gods gracious indulgence, as not to suffer the ordinance of his goodness and favour . . . to be ser’d and stigmatiz’d upon his servants to their misery and thraldome, much lesse will he suffer it now under the covenant of grace, by abrogating his former grant of remedy and releef. (CPW 2.243-44)

Long ago, Arthur Barker wrote that the consideration of indifferents contributes more broadly to the development of Milton’s thought.⁶² An interest in divine allowance and prohibition, and intense reflection about divorce (‘in itself no evil or unjust thing’) and marriage (‘neither good nor bad’) — ‘both in themselves indifferent’⁶³ — is the seed-time, Barker argued, for ideas about Christian liberty that produce *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* and *A Treatise of Civil Power*. (One could add that they also make possible the poet whom Coleridge called ‘that most interesting of the Devil’s Biographers.’⁶⁴)

⁶² Arthur Barker, *Milton and the Puritan Dilemma, 1641-1660* (Toronto, 1942), 98-120.

⁶³ CPW 2.646, 6.353.

⁶⁴ The remark appears in a footnote to the seventh stanza of ‘The Devil’s Thoughts.’ See *The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. E.H. Coleridge, Vol. 1, 321.

What is clearly true is that freedom over indifferents gives a new robustness to Milton's description of the conscience. In the area *ex Templo* — in the field of the world — a man may decide whether or not to follow 'the rule of charity': 'the greatest, the perfectest, the highest commandment' (CPW 2.667). In another passage that was added to the second edition of *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, Milton compares this work to the act of creation. 'By [God's] divorcing command the world first rose out of Chaos' (CPW 2.272). The exercise of the individual, taught by a Bible that strains him to straightness, will renew it out of confusion.

III.

I have suggested that the pamphlets on 'domestic or personal liberty' propose an exchange between two senses of the word 'arbitrary.' One, the 'arbitrary' of wilful behaviour, is associated with a diminution of freedom and groundless submission. The other, the 'arbitrary' of temperance and right reason, brings liberty to the individual.

Readers of Lucretius will recall that the aetiology of choice in *De Rerum Natura* is sustained by a contrast in which these poles are reversed. The Roman poet's discussion of the quality he calls *voluntas* proceeds from the premise that every man possesses the strength to withstand the forces around him. Suppose you are in a crowd, and bodies press you in one direction. You are able to resist; you can command your limbs to stay in place. (The success of these efforts is another matter. It is possible you will be trampled.) Lucretius classifies this capacity 'to fight and stand in the way' (*pugnare obstareque*) as a species of the *arbitrium*.⁶⁵ At the same time, he recognizes that the atomism at the centre of his natural philosophy has the potential to steal away any ground on which this freedom might be based. In a universe guided by nothing other than the physics of random atomic collisions, what is there to repeal the 'unalterable succession' of movements, to prevent a chain of causation in which even the mind is governed by the internal necessity (*necessum intestinum*, DRN 2.289-90) of its parts? An escape from

⁶⁵ DRN 2.280-81.

this early version of Laplace's Demon is made possible by a feature of atomic motion that Lucretius calls the *exiguum clinamen*, the 'minute swerve' (*DRN* 2.292). Atoms, he writes, have a tendency to veer slightly from their expected paths; the movement occurs at 'unpredictable times and places' (*DRN* 2.220) and 'only to an infinitesimal degree' (*DRN* 2.244-45). Yet it is enough to sever the threads of destiny, and make possible the dazzling cosmic turbulence of which we catch a glimpse whenever light pours into a dark room:

multa minuta modis multis per inane videbis
 corpora misceri radiorum lumine in ipso
 et velut aeterno certamine proelia pugnas
 edere turmatim certantia nec dare pausam,
 conciliis et discidiis exercita crebris;
 conicere ut possis ex hoc, primordia rerum
 quale sit in magno iactari semper inani.

(You will see many minute particules mingling in many ways throughout the void in the light itself of the rays, and as it were in everlasting conflict struggling, fighting, battling in troops without any pause, driven about with frequent meetings and partings; so that you may conjecture from this what it is for the first-beginnings of things to be every tossed about in the great void.)⁶⁶

Lucretius's solution gives radical shape to the 'arbitrary' which, for Milton, is associated with Charles I. The Roman poet pushes to its imaginative limits the thought of a body that is capricious, irreconcilable to rule, and then models his description of choice on its behaviour. Later, Dostoevsky's Underground Man follows a similar line of thought to resist the crystal edifice, two times two is four. Sometimes a man 'may wish to swerve aside,' to act with 'caprice, however wild' — may even do himself harm — simply, he says, 'to have the right to wish for himself even what is stupidest of all.'⁶⁷

John Leonard supposes Milton to be thinking of Lucretius when he calls Chance the 'high Arbiter' of chaos in Book 2 of *Paradise Lost*. Where this being 'governs all,' where 'Chaos umpire sits,' all that can be hoped for are the unpredictable deviations

⁶⁶ *DRN* 2.116-22. The hypothesis addresses a second problem. Lucretius supposes that atoms of every weight are constantly falling downward at the same speed. Without the *clinamen*, they would sink through the endless abyss of space like drops of rain, and 'nature would never have created anything' (*DRN* 2.224).

⁶⁷ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground*, 1.7-1.9, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York, 1993), 25, 30, 32.

typical of the Lucretian *arbitrium*. He contrasts this condition with the description of Adam and Eve in Paradise: ‘to stand or fall / Free in thine own arbitrament it lies’ (8.640-41). Perhaps the distinction is not quite so clear-cut. I would like to complicate the view of choice which I presented in the last section. My contention is that the forces that lead the author of *De Rerum Natura* to put his trust in a *clinamen* also reduce the scope of decision given over by Milton to the individual. In *De Doctrina*, Milton writes of a decision undertaken with ‘freedom of action, or madness’: *libertatem certe, aut insaniam* (CPW 6.710). The alternative traced below is not so striking. I argue, rather, that the freedom earned by trading one ‘arbitrary’ for the other is not as vigorous and enduring as it first appears.

Let us return to the divorce tracts. Milton, I have already noted, uses the broadest of terms to describe a marriage that is worthy of dissolution. It is one in which there is no possibility of an ‘apt and cheerful conversation’ — no chance for ‘meetnes and help and solace.’ Milton is interested by the ‘wandring vacancy’ that is love’s co-partner.⁶⁸ He writes of a capacity for error to which all men are susceptible, even ‘the best and wisest’ ones, who select their wives ‘amidst the sincere and most cordiall designes of their heart’ (CPW 2.598). God does not take offence when we choose clumsily:

Yet now there is nothing in the life of man through our misconstruction, made more uncertain, more hazardous and full of chance then this divine blessing with such favourable significance heer conferr’d upon us, which if we do but erre in our choice the most unblamable error that can be . . . this divine blessing that lookt but now with such a human smile upon us, and spoke such gentle reason, strait vanishes like a fair skie and brings on such a scene of cloud and tempest, as turns to shipwreck without havn or shoar but to a ransomles captivity. (CPW 2.600-1)

It is true that there are despairing husbands of whom it may justly be said, ‘Why took he not better heed, let him now smart, and bear his folly as he may’ (CPW 2.629). Milton works to draw out the inconsistency between this view and broader ideas about God. Would the Father, he asks, who ‘grants every where to error easy remitments,’ inter a

⁶⁸ CPW 2.597. James Grantham Turner observes that the Hebrew verb *tisgah*, which the King James translators render as ‘ravish’ in Proverbs 5:20, has as its root meaning ‘wander’ or ‘err.’ See Turner, *One Flesh* (Oxford, 1987), 76.

couple to perpetual misery for ‘a most incident error which no warines can certainly shun’ (CPW 2.601)?

Failure in a marriage, after all, is decided largely by factors beyond a couple’s reach. The fault frequently lies with a ‘natural disparity’ (CPW 2.280), ‘natural unmeetnes’ (CPW 2.677), or some other circumstance falling under ‘the dominion of blameles nature’ (CPW 2.680). ‘Radical and innocent affections’ (CPW 2.345) recoil, a ‘venerable & secret power’ (CPW 2.238) cries foul, and an inference about God immediately follows: He ‘commands not impossibilities’ (CPW 2.606). Divorce results from ‘causes rooted in immutable nature, utter unfitnessse, utter disconformity, not concileable, because not to be amended without a miracle’ (CPW 2.669-70). Nature demands the separation herself. ‘Which thing more natural, more original and first in nature,’ Milton writes, ‘then to depart from that which is irksom, greevous, actively hateful, and injurious eevn to hostility, especially in a conjugal respect, wherein antipathies are invincible’ (CPW 2.621-22).

The anonymous writer of the *Answer to The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* greets this argument with scepticism. He mocks the description of a ‘mutuall antypathie’ in which a husband shrinks from his wife ‘as a man doth’ from ‘a Toad or Poyson.’ The case is never so; discord is always ‘wilfully nourished.’⁶⁹ Milton concedes in *Colasterion* that an amphibian chilliness is rare. He appeals instead to a fact known to everyone, that certain people can never love each other, and never would be happy if they were married:

That there is in man a particular sway of liking, or disliking in the affairs of matrimony is evidently seen before mariage among those who can bee freindly, can respect each other, yet to marry each other would not for any perswasion. If then this unfitnes and disparity bee not till after mariage discovered, through many causes, and colours, and concealements, that may overshadow; undoubtedly it will produce the same effects and perhaps with more vehemence, that such a mistakn pair, would give the world to be unmarried again. (CPW 2.622-23)

A child unites the positive ends of two magnets and holds them together in her hands.

⁶⁹ *An Answer* (1644), 11. Should Milton find a couple made miserable ‘not at all for any ill qualities that either sees in the other . . . let him send his Book to them to take the benefit of it.’

Once she lets them go, the magnets separate. Civil protections do nothing more to an ill-suited couple. The law holds a ‘natural enmity . . . by violence from parting’ (CPW 2.622). (The difference between magnets and people is that unlike people are repulsed, not attracted: ‘meet from unmeet, guilty from guiltless, contrary from contrary.’) Milton writes elsewhere of a man and a woman that an ‘intimat quality of good or evil . . . like a radical heat, or moral chilness joyns them, or disjoyns them inseparably’ (CPW 2.606). The trouble, he understands, is that conjugal love ‘requires not only moral but natural causes to the making and mayntayning’ (CPW 2.680). Having added ‘naturall Philosophy’ and ‘the institution of Physick’ (CPW 2.392) to the course of study in *Of Education*, he draws upon these subjects to make a similar point in *Colasterion*:

I appeal to all experience, though there bee many drugs to purge those redundant humours, and circulations that commonly impair health, and are not natural, whether any man can with the safety of his life bring a healthy constitution into physic with this designe, to alter his natural temperament, and disposition of minde. How much more vain, and ridiculous would it bee, by altering and rooting up the grounds of nature, which is most likely to produce death or madnes, to hope the reducing of a minde to this or that fitnes, or two disagreeing mindes to a mutual sympathy. Suppose they might, and with great danger of thir lives and right sense, alter one temperature, how can they know that the succeeding disposition will not bee as farre from fitnes and agreement? They would perhaps change Melancholy into Sanguin, but what if fleam, and choler in as great a measure come instead, the unfitnes will be still as difficult and troublesom. (CPW 2.737)

The absurd and barbarous rules of the *status quo* require no less of an unhappy partner than the sort of elemental transformation about which Milton speculates in *Paradise Lost*. It is work suited for that ‘empiric alchemist,’ who ‘can turn, or holds it possible to turn / Metals of drossiest ore to perfet gold / As from the mine’ (5.440-43).

An earlier text gives a more elaborate role to the physical world. In the *Uxor Hebraica*, John Selden translates a passage from Ptolemy’s *Tetrabiblos* in which the ancient writer suggests that the permanence of a marriage depends on the harmonious configuration of ‘natal luminaries.’ It lasts ‘when the figures of the bodies form a triangle or a hexagon and especially when a reciprocal change takes place and all the more when the moon of the man is in line with the sun of the wife.’ Failure, in turn, is unavoidable ‘when the ordained positions of the heavenly bodies . . . happen to be either

in unconnected signs or in a diagonal or square to each other.’⁷⁰

Milton uses a similar image as a figure for the condition of misalignment that makes a marriage unworkable. He urges an unhappy pair to attempt to resolve their differences, but he writes at the same time of a ‘natural inability’ (CPW 2.632), out of reach of the will and the law:

For Nature hath her *Zodiac* also, keepes her great annual circuit over human things as truly as the sun and Planets in the firmament; hather her *anomalies*, hath her obliquities in ascensions and declinations, accesses and recesses, as blamelessly as they in heaven. And sitting in her planetary Orb with two rains in each hand, one strait, the other loos, tempers the cours of minds as well as bodies to several conjunctions and oppositions, freindly, or unfreindly aspects, consenting ofttest with reason, but never contrary. This in the effect no man of meanest reach but daily sees; and though to every one it appear not in the cause, yet to a cleare capacity, well nurtur’d with good reading and observation, it cannot but be plaine and visible. (CPW 2.680-81).

The same view appears in a chapter of *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* that announces, in its subheading, that ‘to prohibit divorce sought for natural causes is against nature.’ Milton considers the factors that make a marriage impossible: ‘Whether each ones allotted *Genius* or proper *Starre*, or whether the supernall influence of Schemes and angular aspects of this elemental *Crisis* here below, whether all these jointly or singly meeting friendly, or unfriendly, I dare not, with the men I am likeliest to clash, appear so much a Philosopher as to conjecture’ (CPW 2.271).

The most serious case for the influence of nature comes, however, from Eden. In Genesis 2:22-24, Adam discovers his new companion and names her:

And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. / And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because he was taken out of Man. / Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.

⁷⁰ Selden, *Uxor Hebraica*, 3.22, trans. Jonathan R. Ziskind (Leiden, 1990), 401-2. It is hard to imagine that Milton could have known the passage from Ptolemy through Selden, since the *Uxor Hebraica* was not published until 1646, a year after the last divorce pamphlet. There is no doubt, however, that he had read Selden’s great treatise on natural law, *De Jure Naturali et Gentium juxta Disciplinam Ebraerum* (1640), which is cited in *Areopagitica* and in *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*. Eivion Owen, ‘Milton and Selden on Divorce’ *SP* 43 (1946), 233-57, argues that Milton had access to a draft of the *Uxor Hebraica* as early as 1645, while Matthew Biberman, ‘Milton, Marriage, and a Woman’s Right to Divorce,’ *SEL* 39 (1999), 134 n. 7, settles even more boldly on 1643. Further discussion appears in Jason Rosenblatt, *Torah and Law in ‘Paradise Lost’* (Princeton, 1994), 105-6.

The bond, of course, is unique to human history. Its fleshiness is impressive to Milton ('no other woman was ever moulded out of her husbands rib') and he allows, in *Tetrachordon*, that the resulting alliance was 'neerer . . . then could be ever after between husband and wife' (CPW 2.601). Founded upon the extraction of a rib, which bloodies the ground, the union seems permanent, at least to Eve, who recollects Adam's claim over her in Book 4 of *Paradise Lost*:

to give thee being I lent
Out of my side to thee, nearest to my heart
Substantial life, to have thee by my side
Henceforth an individual solace dear. (483-86)

The adjective 'individual' is used with reference to its Latin root, *individuus*, 'indivisible.' The voice that calls Eve away from her wet reflection offers the same promise of a companion joined 'inseparably' (4.473).

Yet it is on just this subject that Milton chooses to argue that physical necessity plays a smaller role than we had anticipated. He expresses a deep repugnance to the idea that the origins of marriage lie in a bodily transfer. The relation, for one thing, cannot stand. If nature constitutes the bond, the ties of mother and child are closer than those of husband and wife in every generation but the first. Furthermore, a partnership in Eden that depends 'meerly upon flesh & bones' means that the creation of woman is a massive disappointment. In a singularly unimaginative sequence, God promises 'a meet help' for Adam and comes up with a union no different from those of the animals. It is 'as if his consultation had produc't no other good for man, but to joyn him with an accidentall companion of propagation' (CPW 2.309).

The thought that the Bible entrusts marriage to the body does a particular and unexpected injustice to Adam. The Genesis account shows him naming the animals before Eve is created. Milton adds in *Paradise Lost* that the task required an understanding of each creature: knowledge, Adam says, with which 'God endued / [His] sudden apprehension' (8.353-54). *Tetrachordon* argues that he should also have been able 'to discern perfectly, that which concerned him much more.' Milton, indeed, shows

the first man committing himself to his new companion only after an act of choice. Adam 'did not establish an indissoluble bond of marriage in the carnall ligaments of flesh and bones'; it was in his power 'to apprehend at first sight the true fitness of that consort which God had provided him' (CPW 2.602). The scene of recognition is allowed to unfold in Book 8 of *Paradise Lost*, when Adam recalls his reaction when Eve approached him for the first time. He realized immediately that his longing for a 'fit help' (8.450) had been answered, and words of gratitude spilled irresistibly from his lips:

This turn hath made amends; thou hast fulfilled
Thy words, creator bounteous and benign,
Giver of all things fair, but fairest this
Of all thy gifts, nor enviest. (8.491-94)

Before he accepts her, Adam states for the record his awareness of this new creature's suitability. She is a being of such perfection that he feels the urge to thank God for offering her unbegrudgingly. *Tetrachordon* glosses Genesis 2:24 ('the great knot tier,' Milton calls it) as though Adam had overheard God declare His intent to make 'an help meet' for man, and is registering his approval.⁷¹ To maintain that he knows only the 'anatomy of a rib' is to show Adam to be 'so very an idiot as the Socinians make him; which would not be reverently don of us' (CPW 2.603-4).

Divorce is possible in Eden, too. The body, Milton submits, cannot hold together a marriage, even one tied so intimately to the flesh. Aristophanes says in Plato's *Symposium* that Zeus created male and female forms by cutting eight-limbed beings in two, 'as they slice sorb-apples to make a dry preserve, or eggs with hairs.'⁷² Milton prefers a messier image when he considers the separation of Adam and Eve. A man's leg stinks of rot, or his chest is heavy with a tumour's terrible bloom, and he yearns for the surgeon's knife. The bone affords no surety to the union in Paradise:

⁷¹ 'Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife; and they shall be one flesh.' But it is not clear who is speaking. Milton attributes the verse variously to God and to Adam, usually choosing whichever party is more convenient at the time. Here, he argues that the 'joyning particle *Therefore*' shows Adam referring 'first and most principally' to 'what God spake concerning the inward essence of Mariage in his institution' (CPW 2.603).

⁷² *Symposium* 190e, in the Loeb ed., trans. W.R.M. Lamb (New York, 1925), 139.

If God took a rib out of his inside, to form of it a double good to him, he would far sooner dis-joyn it from his outside, to prevent a treble mischief to him: and far sooner cut it quite off from all relation for his undoubted ease, then nail it into his body again, to stick for ever there a thorn in his heart. When as nature teaches us to divide any limb from the body to the saving of its fellows, though it be the maiming and deformity of the whole; how much more is it her doctrin to sever by incision, not a true limb so much, though that be lawfull, but an adherent, a sore, the gangrene of a limb, to the recovery of a whole man. (CPW 2.602)

Adam arrives at a rough version of this conclusion in Book 10 of *Paradise Lost*. He lays all his troubles on Eve, a serpent, he says, or a rib, ‘crooked by nature, bent, as now appears,’ and ‘well if thrown out’ (10.884-87). Earlier, Adam has passed up the chance to dissolve his marriage on fairer grounds. In Book 9, he perceives that his wife reverences a tree and recognizes at once the noontide entrance of death. When she invites him to fall, what Adam calls the ‘link of nature’ seems inviolable. ‘Flesh of flesh, / Bone of my bone thou art, and from thy state / Mine never shall be parted’ (9.914-16). The union ‘cannot be sever’d, we are one / One flesh’ (9.958-69). Dennis Burden comments that Adam overlooks an obvious solution to his troubles when he submits ‘to what seem’d remediless’ (9.919), and eats. ‘The important thing is that Adam has a remedy and Milton of all people must know it. The remedy is divorce.’⁷³

In *Tetrachordon*, Milton is puzzled by David Paraeus’s account of marriage as ‘an indissoluble conjunction of one man and one woman in an individual and intimat conversation, and mutual benevolence’ (CPW 2.609). He finds it odd that Paraeus would agree to ‘indissoluble’ and ‘individual,’ a tautology, and not entirely true, since by all accounts adultery is sufficient to cancel the bond. As Milton clarifies his own position, it becomes evident that he is calling for something quite strange. He is revising and pushing back the act of decision that establishes a union. Consider the definition of marriage that Milton substitutes for Paraeus’s: it is ‘a divine institution joyning man and woman in a love fitly dispos’d to the helps and comforts of domestic life’ (CPW 2.612). Here is Milton’s gloss on these words:

Joyning man and woman in a love, &c. This brings in the parties consent: until

⁷³ Burden, *The Logical Epic* (London, 1967), 168-69. Northrop Frye makes the same point in *The Return of Eden* (Toronto, 1965), 65.

which be, the mariage hath no true beeing. When I say consent, I mean not error, for error is not properly consent: And why should not consent be heer understood with equity and good to either part, as in all other freindly covenants, and not to be strain'd and cruelly urg'd to the mischeif and destruction of both? Neither doe I mean that singular act of consent which made the contract, for that may remain, and yet the mariage not true or lawful . . . The consent I mean which is a love fitly dispos'd to mutual help and comfort of life; this is that happy Form of mariage naturally arising from the heart of a divine institution in the Text, in all the former definitions either obscurely, and under mistak'n terms exprest, or not at all. (CPW 2.612-13)

In a passage from Euripides that Aristophanes lampooned, to great effect, Hippolytus says: 'My tongue made a promise. My mind did not.'⁷⁴ Milton is making the subtler point that the mind, in marriage, is often *unable* to consent when the tongue does. A marriage cannot begin to exist unless there is love and fitness between the two parties. Following this line of thought, *Tetrachordon* suggests that agreement to marry is not possible until there is empirical evidence of these qualities — until, in other words, there is a marriage to which they can agree. In unhappy cases, the vows of the wedding ceremony are meaningless. Uttered without knowledge of compatibility, they commit a man and a woman to a union that never can have 'true beeing.' Milton's view immediately turns to nonsense the *vinculum coniugii* described by Paraeus.⁷⁵ A bond, a real one, lasts in 'actuall' terms as a consequence of its success. 'Mariage is not true mariage by beeing individual, but therefore individual, if it be true Mariage.'⁷⁶

The passage in *Tetrachordon* is an outstanding example of what David Masson identifies as Milton's 'preference for the theoretical over what may be called the practical style of argument.'⁷⁷ The poet seems to be trying to convince the reader that marriage is

⁷⁴ *Hippolytos*, l. 612, trans. Robert Bagg (London, 1973), 46. Aristophanes spoofs the line in the *Frogs*, ll. 101 and 1471. It is also mentioned by Aristotle at *Rhetoric* 1416a. I thank Tony Nuttall for suggesting the comparison.

⁷⁵ 'Ut coniugii vinculum semel firmatum maneat ratum & indissolubile: & quidem duos tantum: Et erunt duo in carnem unam.' David Paraeus, *In Genesin*, in his *Operum theologicorum*, Vol. 1 (Frankfurt, 1647), 106.

⁷⁶ CPW 2.610. Milton sometimes prefers to call divorce a 'nullity,' in order to recognize that what the partners believed to be a marriage was nothing at all. See, for example, the subtitle to *Tetrachordon*: 'Expositions upon the foure chiefe places in Scripture which treat of Mariage, or nullities in Mariage.'

⁷⁷ Masson, *Life* (1880), Vol. 3, 74.

for better but *not* for worse. Masson is anxious about the type of man whom he calls ‘a private Henry the Eighth’:

He marries No. 1 and, after a while, on the plea that he does not find that she suits him, he gives her a bill of divorcement; No. 2 comes and is treated in like manner; and so on, till the brutal rascal, undeniably free from all legal censure, may be living in the centre of a perfect solar system of discarded wives, moving in nearer or farther orbits round him, according to the times when they were thrown off, and each with her one or two satellites of little darlings!⁷⁸

An objection which registers more precisely is that the decision to divorce, once these caveats about nature and consent have been absorbed, is not nearly as interesting as we had supposed. Rather than being an assertion of human dignity, or an affirmation of the precious gift of partnership, the choice mostly involves the recognition of a state already settled. True: a man consumed by grief, battling ‘invincible causes and effects’ (CPW 2.272), may vow to persist; or, basking in happiness, he may opt for dissolution. In most instances, however, the decision will be fairly trivial. He will surrender to forces over which he never had any control.

A different sort of encroachment comes from Heaven. Milton writes in *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* that the ‘calling to marry’ (CPW 2.273) is a ‘desire which God put into *Adam* in Paradise’ (CPW 2.250). Each of us feels an ‘intellectual and innocent desire which God himself kindl’d . . . to be the bond of wedlock’ (CPW 2.269). The Father, since He is omniscient, knows the success of a match beforehand. The implications of this foreknowledge are spelled out in a passage in *Tetrachordon*. Milton pens a series of remarks on Matthew 19:6, ‘What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder’:

That is to say, what God hath joyn’d; for if it be, as how oft we see it may be, not of Gods joining, and his law tells us he joyne not unmatchable things but hates to joyne them, as an abominable confusion, then the divine law of *Moses* puts them asunder, his owne divine will in the institution puts them asunder, as oft the reasons be not extant, for which only God ordain’d their joining. Man only puts asunder when his inordinate desires, his passion, his violence, his injury makes the breach: not when the utter want of that which lawfully was the end of his joining, when wrongs and extremities, and unsupportable greivances compell him to disjoyne . . . In a word, if it be unlawful for man to put asunder that which God hath joyn’d, let man take heede it be not detestable to joyne that

⁷⁸ Masson, *Life* (1880), Vol. 3, 75.

by compulsion which God hath put asunder. (CPW 2.651)

In their divorce, Milton writes, ‘unmatchable’ partners are preceded by God. Before they decide to separate, He has ‘put asunder’ the union, that is, has dissolved it *already*. The lone instance in which ‘only man separates’ (CPW 2.651) involves sin. To choose for himself, a man must act unreasonably, with ‘inordinate desires,’ ‘passion,’ ‘violence,’ ‘injury.’ The more radical consequence of this view appears in *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*. Milton writes that a man and a woman who discover that their bond is unworkable can be certain that God never approved it. ‘When it shall be found by their apparent unfitness, that their continuing to be man and wife is against the glory of God and their mutuall happiness, it may assure them that God never joyn’d them.’⁷⁹

Several additional problems are introduced by a curious passage that appears a few pages later in the treatise. Taking as his cue Melantheus’s insulting words to Odysseus,⁸⁰ Milton looks broadly at the causes of a bad match:

The ancient proverb in *Homer* lesse abstruse intitles this worke of leading each like person to his like, peculiarly to God himselfe: which is plain anough also by his naming of a meet or like help in the first espousall instituted; and that every woman is meet for every man, none so absurd as to affirm. Seeing then there is indeed a twofold Seminary or stock in nature, from whence are deriv’d the issues of love and hatred distinctly flowing through the whole masse of created things, and that Gods doing ever is to bring the due likenesses and harmonies of his workes together, except when out of two contraries met to their own destruction, he moulds a third existence, and that is error, or some evil Angel which either blindly or maliciously hath drawn together in two persons ill imbarckt in wedlock the sleeping discords or enmities of nature lull’d on purpose with some false bait, that they may wake to agony and strife. (CPW 2.271-72)

At a troubling moment in *Paradise Lost*, Eve recalls the voice that compelled her to leave her watery reflection and go to Adam: ‘What could I do, / But follow strait, invisibly thus led?’ (4.475-76). An outside force again is alleged when Samson remembers his

⁷⁹ CPW 2.277. Milton writes in *Tetrachordon* that the efficient cause or ‘Author’ of a marriage between a man and a woman is ‘God and their consent’ (CPW 2.608). What follows from this claim is that the choice of a bad marriage is not *possible*, since God will never agree to it. This implication is nested already in Milton’s revision of Paraeus. The partners cannot consent to matrimony before mutual help and solace are established; if they are ill-suited, therefore, they will be unable to establish a union, even by themselves.

⁸⁰ *Odyssey* 17.217-18, as Odysseus and Eumaeus approach Ithaca: ‘In very truth the vile leads the vile; as ever, the god is bringing like and like together.’ Trans. A.T. Murray, in the Loeb ed. (Cambridge, MA, 1953), Vol. 2, 171.

marriage to the woman of Timna. ‘What I motioned was of God,’ he says.⁸¹ In *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, Milton is making the provocative claim that this type of event is ordinary. God, having formed the world by joining ‘like things to like’ (*PL* 7.240), is now occupied with the secondary act of ‘leading each like person to his like.’ And, as at the creation of the heavens and earth, another force protests. ‘A third existence,’ ‘error, or some evil Angel,’ employs an eye for confusion to defeat Heaven’s work. Speaking in velvet tones to a man and a woman who should not be married, he causes the ‘discords or enmities of nature’ to slumber. The partners ‘wake to agony and strife.’

If God has a direct hand in a good match, error — or Error, rather, a presence like Chaos and Chance — assumes responsibility for a poor one. Milton, so far as I can tell, repeats this suggestion elsewhere on only two occasions. One is in *Tetrachordon*, where he writes of divorces ‘for necessary and just causes; where charity and wisdom disjoyns, that which not God, but Error and Disastre joyn’d’ (*CPW* 2.677). The other is when he discusses marriage in *De Doctrina*:

Coniunxit Deus quod sociabile est, quod idoneum est, quod bonum est, quod honestum est; non gryphes equis, non quod turpe, quod miserum, quod infestum, quod calamitosum: hoc vis, aut temeritas, aut error, malusque genius, non Deus coniunxit. (*Col.* 15.156)

God has joined together things compatible, fit, good and honorable: he has not joined chalk and cheese: he has not joined things base, wretched, ill-omened and disastrous. It is violence or rashness or error or some evil genius which joins things like this, not God. (*CPW* 6.372)

One wonders, nevertheless, how cleanly a capacity for temperate, fortifying choice has come out of the superfluities of the divine word. In *Tetrachordon*, Milton writes of the ‘Wisdom, Purity, Justice, and rule over all other creatures’ given to Adam in Eden:

All which being lost in *Adam*, was recover’d with gain by the merits of Christ. For albeit our first parent had lordship over sea, and land, and aire, yet there was a law without him, as a guard set over him. But Christ having cancell’d the hand writing of ordinances which was against us . . . hath, in that respect set us over

⁸¹ *Samson Agonistes*, 222. The view is affirmed by Manoa, who recollects this instance of ‘divine impulsion’ (422), and by the Chorus — see ll. 315-21. Scriptural support comes from Judges 14:3-4: ‘Samson said unto his father, Get her for me, for shee pleaseth me well. / But his father and his mother knew not that it was of the Lord.’

law, in the free custody of his love, and left us victorious under the guidance of his living Spirit, not under the dead letter. (CPW 2.587-88)

The generosity of Christ makes available to men a power of decision that is more robust than Adam's, more God-like, even, being as it is without the restraint concerning the Tree. I have been suggesting that other forces crowd in on this 'state above prescriptions.' Nature, and Heaven, and a third, independent agent, perhaps, diminish the scope of choice that has been purchased by Jesus's transcendent act of love. The reader is reminded of the ground — *ex Templo*, indifferent; in the early works, subject to scorn — on which Christian liberty is being established.

III : Life in the Garden

Satan's approach to Eden in the fourth book of *Paradise Lost* affords the reader a rare look at the world just outside the garden. The fallen angel, reaching the base of that 'rural mound' whose hilltop Paradise crowns, pauses for a moment to gaze upward. Within the garden, soaring higher even than its verdurous walls, 'goodliest trees loaden with fairest fruit' (4.147) may be seen. The hillside Satan must climb to reach them, however, is 'a steep wilderness.' Huge trees shade the way, and beneath their dense canopy is the thick undergrowth of 'shrubs and tangling bushes' (4.176) — nature unchecked, 'grotesque and wild' (4.136). To gain the summit is difficult: this steep forest, Milton tells us, 'had perplexed / All path of Man or Beast that passed that way' (4.176-77). Outside Eden, we find wild overgrowth and branches entwined to impede access. The glint of golden blossoms and the balmy scent of 'pure now purer air' promise a lovely scene within.

Milton has taken as his model a moment from *The Faerie Queene*. In the third book of that poem, Belpheobe finds Arthur's squire Timias bleeding from his struggle with a group of woodsmen. She and her damsels carry him off to heal in a 'faire Pavilion . . . richly dight,' a place which resembles 'an earthly Paradize' (3.5.40). It lies deep within 'that forest farre,'

in a pleasant glade,
With mountaines round about environed,
And mighty woods, which did the valley shade,
And like a stately Theatre it made,
Spreading it selfe into a spacious plaine. (3.5.39)

Milton's description of the wilderness surrounding Eden recalls Spenser's with unusual accuracy. In *Paradise Lost*, dense ranks of trees rise up towards the garden hilltop, 'shade above shade, a woody theatre / Of stateliest view' (4.141-42). *Theatre* because of the drama Satan will soon observe from his perch on the Tree of Life, although for

Milton the word is darker than it is for Spenser; the Fiend himself will prove a fine actor, tuning 'his proem' (9.549) before tempting Eve. The two poets make essentially the same comparison. Both imagine a privileged space surrounded by a natural amphitheatre.¹ Each encourages us, moreover, to think of a 'stage' at the centre that stands out physically from its wild surroundings. For Spenser, Belphoebe's pavilion rests in a 'dainty place,' with songbirds and fragrant laurel trees. Eden, in Milton's description, is the sort of land where incense smells nice without needing to be burned and where trees bend down their branches so that man can eat without having to stand up. In both poems, a lovely enclosed place enjoys order and natural cooperation. Outside it, there are 'mighty woods,' a 'steep and savage hill.'

Let us extend the comparison between Spenser and Milton a bit further. Readers of *The Faerie Queene* will remember the beautiful narrative pause that occurs just after the scene I have described. Spenser, recounting the history of Amoret, Belphoebe's sister, describes her childhood in the Garden of Adonis. It is a place of colour and sunshine:

There is continuall spring, and harvest there
 Continuall, both meeting at one time:
 For both the boughes doe laughing blossomes beare,
 And with fresh colours decke the wanton Prime,
 And eke attonce the heavy trees they clime,
 Which seeme to labour under their fruits lode:
 The whiles the joyous birdes make their pastime
 Emongst the shadie leaves, their sweet abode,
 And their true loves without suspicion tell abode. (3.6.42)

What is extraordinary about Spenser's vision of the garden is that its perfection is natural, constantly maintained against the mutability of Time. Venus and Adonis couple eternally, 'one flesh' like Adam and Eve, but their union is 'by succession made perpetuall' (3.6.47). Spenser, we are reminded forcefully, has dismissed the image of Paradise against which Wallace Stevens protests in 'Sunday Morning.' 'Do the boughs / Hang always heavy in that perfect sky, / Unchanging?' Of course not. Their leaves are always growing, always dying. In the Garden of Adonis, we find not the niggard

¹ The metaphor does not work quite as well for Milton. Where Belphoebe's pavilion is in a valley, Eden rests on a hilltop. The amphitheatre, it seems to me, would have to be inverted.

Nature of the Bower of Bliss, made sterile by the gilt trappings of Art, but instead ‘all plentie, and all pleasure’ (3.6.41) — an abundance replenished again and again, forever defeating Time’s scythe.

Although Spenser’s garden is very much like the biblical Eden, the poet has not tried to describe Eden itself. Earlier in *The Faerie Queene*, Redcrosse does pass through that first garden, now ruined and ruled by a dragon. The Garden of Adonis is instead a lovely place in what is still, even in faery land, a fallen world. As a result, Spenser is not bound to represent Scripture with the exacting integrity against which Milton sometimes struggles. The plants in the Garden of Adonis, for instance, ‘remember well’ only half of ‘the mightie word’ of the Lord. He ‘bad them to increase and multiply’ (3.6.34), Spenser tells us, a rather selective recollection of Genesis 1:28, in which God orders Adam and Eve to ‘be fruitful, and multiply, *and* replenish the earth, *and* subdue it.’ In the second chapter of the Bible, in fact, it appears that Eden cannot even begin to grow until there is ‘man to till the soil’:

When the Lord God made heaven and earth — / when no shrub of the field was yet on earth and no grasses of the field had yet sprouted, because the Lord had not sent rain upon the earth, and there was no man to till the soil, / but a flow would well up from the ground and water the whole surface of the earth— / the Lord God formed man from the dust of the earth . . . / The Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and placed there the man whom He had formed.²

The Garden of Adonis, on the other hand, needs no keeper ‘to set, or sow / To plant or prune.’ Flowers bloom there ‘of their owne account’ (3.6.34), and Venus and Adonis make no effort to subdue the place.

The Eden of *Paradise Lost* resembles the Garden of Adonis in several respects that may cause us surprise. Most interesting is Milton’s sense that Paradise must be maintained against a necessary threat — the danger not of too much death, as in Spenser, but rather of too much life. In this respect, J. Martin Evans has written,³ Milton is

² This passage is confusing to modern ears in the King James translation. The Jewish Publication Society version (Philadelphia, 1985), reproduced here, more clearly renders the meaning of the Hebrew text.

³ Evans, ‘*Paradise Lost*’ and the Genesis Tradition (Oxford, 1968), 247-48.

original among his contemporaries. The overgrowth and shaggy hills of Eden were so interesting to Horace Walpole a century later that he hailed Milton's 'prophetic eye of taste,' which seemed 'to have conceived, to have foreseen modern gardening.'⁴ At the same time, Milton's Paradise, with the Garden of Adonis, shows far more ancient features.⁵ Milton and Spenser both draw freely upon the Song of Songs, for instance, whose lovers celebrate amid juicy pomegranates and groves of myrrh. Both poets' descriptions recall the marvellous harmony described in Virgil's fourth eclogue.

Paradise Lost, however, far more than *The Faerie Queene*, skates along a descriptive edge. We are never quite sure whether, in Eden, we are in a realm of art or of nature; of a plenty that glorifies its Creator, or of a gross overabundance that threatens to turn into the 'thicket overgrown' outside. We often feel that the garden moves of its own will, that it responds to man with a strength closer to the 'concourse wild' the Boy of Winander surmises than the pathetic fallacy described by Ruskin in *Modern Painters*.⁶ But the same plant life that teems with too many tangles, 'not nice Art,' provides dulcet creams for Adam's dinner and is the subject of some of the poem's most beautiful lines. I would like artificially to divide these competing aspects of Milton's Eden: first, by deciding to what extent Milton is able to endorse the traditional view of Paradise, and then by looking at the potential for wildness he has included therein. We shall find, in

⁴ See Walpole, 'On the History of Modern Taste in Gardening,' in *Anecdotes of Painting in England* (second ed., London, 1782), ed. Ralph N. Wornum (London, 1849), Vol. 3, 794. What most impresses Walpole about *Paradise Lost* is Milton's break from the tradition of the *hortus conclusus* that reaches from Babylon to the Countess of Bedford's grounds at Moor Park. The poet, in his blindness, is free from an unfortunate history of innovations for dissecting space (quincunxes, terraces, parterres, gates). He anticipates the modern taste for free streams ('adieu to canals'), forests tumbling with unmaimed trees, and, most of all, the demolition of walls. A contemporary of Walpole's writes less memorably of the appeal of the garden: 'Milton alone of either Charles's time, / In horticulture hit the true sublime . . . The charms of nature live in every line; / The powers of fancy could no higher soar / His Eden blooms as Eden bloom'd before.' See *The rise and progress of the present taste in planting parks, pleasure grounds, gardens, &c.* (London, 1767), 9-10.

⁵ A. Bartlett Giamatti, *The Earthly Paradise and the Renaissance Epic* (Princeton, 1966), traces these influences beautifully.

⁶ See the 1805-6 text of Wordsworth's *Prelude*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt, rev. Helen Darbishire (Oxford, 1959), 5.403. For Ruskin, see the Library Edition of *The Works*, ed. E.T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (London, 1903-12), Vol. 5, 205.

both aspects, that man's role as the gardener of Eden — the feature Spenser so helpfully omitted — proves decisive.

I.

In his commentary on Genesis, Calvin writes that 'Man was rich before he was born': God furnished the world 'with an immense profusion of wealth' so that Adam would lack 'none of the conveniences or necessities of life.'⁷ As we enter Eden with Satan in the fourth book of *Paradise Lost*, the scene seems nearly what Calvin has imagined. Everywhere there is plenty. Trees bend with golden fruit, and flowers blanket hill and dale with colour. Warming the fields, the morning sun licks up mellifluous dew, yet at noontime there is ample shade in bower or cave. Of conveniences, Adam and Eve lack none: they enjoy the 'savory pulp' of nectarines for supper and then sit in the twilight, drinking fresh water in cups made from the rind as an elephant entertains them by twisting his trunk. In this land, clothed 'in rich attire' (7.501), there is no need even to keep a reserve supply of food, as Eve reminds Adam in Book 5:

small store will serve, where store,
All seasons, ripe for use hangs on the stalk;
Save what by frugal storing firmness gains
To nourish, and superfluous moist consumes. (322-25)

In Paradise, Eve tells her husband, she can prepare such a meal that Raphael will 'confess that here on earth / God hath dispensed his bounties as in heaven' (5.329-30).

More remarkable still is the manner in which God has ordered this bounty. What Adam learns to call the 'scale of nature' (5.509) governs all creatures. God indued the 'first matter' of creation with 'various forms, various degrees of substance,' Raphael tells Adam and Eve; He has provided 'bounds / Proportioned to each kind' (5.472-74, 78-79). The angel's explanation is familiar. A similar idea figures in Ulysses's famous speech on 'insisture, course, proportion, season, form' in Shakespeare's *Troilus and*

⁷ Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses, called Genesis* (1554), trans. John King (Edinburgh, 1847-50), Vol. 1, 96.

Cressida, although that play is firmly invested in the hardness of postlapsarian life.⁸

Richard Hooker contends along similar lines that ‘this worlds first creation, and the preservation since of things created’ are ‘but only so far forth a manifestation by execution, what the eternall lawe of God is concerning things natural.’⁹ Raphael’s description is slightly more subtle, and considerably more charming, than these two others. Ulysses, for example, tells Agamemnon in *Troilus* that

The heavens themselves, the planets, and this centre
Observe degree, priority, and place (1.3.85-86),

while the starry sphere above Paradise instead imitates the mystical dance of the angels.

The stars move, Raphael says, in ‘mazes intricate,’

Eccentric, intervolved, yet regular
Then most, when most irregular they seem. (5.622-24)

In the unfallen world, one finds order where one least expects to discover it.

The angel’s assertion of natural organization goes beyond the usual terms of *discordia concors* as well. ‘Not Chaos-like together crush’d and bruis’d, / But, as the world, harmoniously confused,’ Pope writes of ‘Windsor Forest.’¹⁰ So, too, in Eden do ‘all things differ, all agree.’ At the end of Book 4, God brings out his scales to ensure that two unlike elements, earth and air, remain in proper balance. In *Paradise Lost*, however, the natural agreement between creatures is more profound, and their harmony more perfect, than the temperate balance Pope has in mind. The degrees of nature, Raphael tells Adam and Eve, differ like the parts of a flower: the grosser elements, the roots; then, ascending, the stalk, the leaves, at last the ‘bright consummate’ blossom that ‘spirits odorous breathes’ (5.480-81). The metaphor, we then realize, is not quite a metaphor at all. The flower itself participates in nature; it simply represents in miniature the marvellous relationship we find everywhere in Paradise. The passage in which Raphael describes the transubstantiation of eating is among the most pleasing in this

⁸ *Troilus and Cressida* 1.3.74 ff.

⁹ Hooker, *Laws*, Bk. 1, Sect. 3.2, in the *Works* (1977), Vol. 1, 65.

¹⁰ See ll. 13-14. I refer to *The Poems of Alexander Pope*, ed. John Butt (London, 1963).

section of the poem, and it reveals a natural organization more complex almost than we can comprehend. ‘Of elements / The grosser feeds the purer,’ the angel says, ‘earth the sea / Earth and the sea feed air’ (5.415-17). But how wonderful that the sun feeds off Adam’s sweat, as it does in Book 8, or that the moon’s spots are really ‘unpurged / Vapours not yet into her substance turned’ (5.419-20).

Christian theologians have traditionally understood that God provided his creatures with a world of natural order and bounty as a demonstration of His kindness. Milton repeats this line of argument on several occasions in *Paradise Lost*. Adam and Eve observe in their morning prayers that God’s lowest works ‘declare / [His] goodness beyond thought’ (5.158-59); before creation, the angels announce God’s plan to ‘diffuse / His good to worlds and ages infinite.’¹¹ Beneath a sun with ‘more warmth than Adam needs’ (5.302), the fields and groves of Paradise pour forth ‘enormous bliss’ (5.297). God, in this way, shows His goodness and His glory. Even the atmospheric elements ‘that in quaternion run / Perpetual circle’ (5.181-82) attest to His magnificence. Their ‘ceaseless change’ may ‘vary to [the] great Maker still new praise’ (5.183-84).

In a place of such abundance, organised by such a wise hand, what are Adam and Eve to do with themselves? The problem has vexed many critics. ‘It is true,’ Hazlitt admitted, ‘there is little action in this part of Milton’s poem; but there is much repose, and more enjoyment . . . What need was there of action, where the heart was full of bliss and innocence without it! They had nothing to do but feel their own happiness, and “know to know no more.”’¹² Coleridge preferred to avoid the question entirely and to think instead of Milton’s Paradise as pure description. In Eden, ‘you have Milton’s sunny side as a man,’ he wrote. ‘Throughout this part of the poem, the poet is predominant over the theologian.’¹³ The straightforward answer that Adam and Eve spend their days at work,

¹¹ *PL* 7.190-91. Chapter 5 considers this claim at some length.

¹² William Hazlitt, ‘On Shakespeare and Milton,’ in the *Selected Writings*, ed. Duncan Wu (London, 1988), Vol. 2, 226-27.

¹³ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, in the *Collected Works*, ed. Kathleen Coburn et al. (Princeton, 1969-2002), Vol. 5, Part 2, 428.

tending the garden, has left readers of *Paradise Lost* unsatisfied as well. E.M.W. Tillyard's view is the most colourful in a chorus of dissent. Milton is unsuccessful, Tillyard observes, when he attempts 'to introduce people' into Eden. The problem is that he 'can find no adequate scope for their active natures':

Reduced to the ridiculous task of working in a garden which produces of its own accord more than they will ever need, Adam and Eve are in the hopeless position of Old Age Pensioners enjoying perpetual youth . . . We feel that Milton, stranded in his own Paradise, would very soon have eaten the apple on his own responsibility and immediately justified the act in a polemical pamphlet. Any genuine activity would be better than utter stagnation.¹⁴

We should not too readily admit this critic's assumption that Milton unequivocally prefers action to 'utter stagnation.' The final lines of 'Il Penseroso' and the sonnet on his blindness argue against it. So, too, does Raphael's praise of contemplation in Book 5 of *Paradise Lost*. Milton, I believe, might well have encouraged us to find what T.S. Eliot called 'the kind of pattern which we perceive in our own lives only at rare moments of inattention and detachment, drowsing in sunlight.'¹⁵ Should we choose to agree with Tillyard's impression that there is altogether too much 'drowsing in sunlight' in Eden, we find beneath his humour a statement with considerable implications for *Paradise Lost*. If Milton found Eden so boring that he could not convince us that innocence is better than sin, the poem's allegiances move dangerously towards the devil's party.

William Empson once remarked that the trick of the pastoral mode is to take 'a limited life and pretend it's a full and normal one.'¹⁶ Milton, if he is to recover a similar sort of pretence in Eden, must convince us that Adam and Eve have real gardening to do, and that this work is enough to occupy their attentions.¹⁷ Readers of *Paradise Lost* have

¹⁴ E.M.W. Tillyard, *Milton* (London, 1930), 282.

¹⁵ T.S. Eliot, 'John Marston,' in the *Selected Essays, 1917-1932* (London, 1932), 323.

¹⁶ William Empson, *Some Versions* (1935), 110.

¹⁷ In other words, his account of life in Eden must surpass the 'soft' primitivism described by Arthur Lovejoy and George Boas in *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity* (Baltimore, 1935). On their account, the 'soft' primitive is imagined to have lived more easily than a civilised person — free from social conventions, satisfying his native impulses, with the leisure that comes from an ignorance of goods. Lovejoy and Boas cite Hesiod's description, in *Works and Days*, of the 'golden race of mortal men': 'like gods they lived with hearts free from sorrow and remote from toil and grief . . . All good

often felt, however, that the labour itself is risible: it seems either to be contrived, because God surely could have created a garden that needed no tending, or plainly unnecessary, as Tillyard observes, since Eden produces so much food already without the aid of human hands. Milton is not alone in his encounter with this particular difficulty. Man's role as 'tiller of the ground' (Genesis 2:5) made early interpreters of the Bible uneasy as well. Let us look for a moment at one explanation of the task that has particular currency in *Paradise Lost*. In this case, the gardening labour is saved from absurdity because of its effect on the gardener himself.

In the *Legum Allegoria*, his interpretive work on the second and third chapters of Genesis, Philo wonders with what motive God could possibly have 'planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there . . . put the man whom he had formed' (Genesis 2:8). Surely, Philo argues, not 'to provide Himself with pleasant refinement and comfort.' The garden, rather, serves 'for the race of mortals as a copy and reproduction of the heavenly':

Virtue is figuratively called 'garden,' and the locality specially suited to the garden 'Eden,' which means 'luxury' . . . 'And he placed there,' it says, 'the man whom He had formed.' For God, being good and training our race to virtue as the operation most proper to it, places the mind amid virtue, evidently to the end that as a good gardener it may spend its care on nothing else but this.¹⁸

Philo finds in man's role as grounds-keeper an emblem for the process by which he practises his virtue. Substitute 'virtue' for 'garden,' 'the mind' for 'man' himself, and you discover the true meaning of the verse. 'To till the garden and guard it,' the responsibility given to man in Genesis 2:15, becomes a figurative command. Its hidden sense, which Philo has uncovered, is that God has taken 'the pure mind' and 'set it among the virtues that have roots and put forth shoots, that he may till them and guard

things were theirs. For the fruitful earth spontaneously bore their abundant fruit without stint' (27). In *Paradise Lost*, watchfulness is required of Adam and Eve, and they engage in prelapsarian labour that is perhaps too strenuous, as we shall see. Unlike the 'soft' or the 'hard' primitive, however — the latter endures an uncomfortable rusticity of rocky beds and animal predators — the garden's human inhabitants are capable of something like desire.

¹⁸ Philo of Alexandria, *Legum Allegoria* 1.44, in the Loeb ed. of the *Works*, trans. F.H. Colson et al. (Cambridge, MA, 1929-62), Vol. 1, 177.

them.’¹⁹

In English, the word *virtue* itself accommodates both senses. Milton praises the ‘virtuous touch’ of ‘the arch-chemic sun’ (608-9) in Book 3 of *Paradise Lost*. Eve, later, admires the great ‘virtues’ (9.745) of the forbidden fruit. The meaning, in each case, is close to what the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines as ‘efficacy arising from physical qualities.’ Earlier in Book 9, however, Adam and Eve speak of a ‘virtue’ more like Virgilian *virtus*, what the *OED* calls ‘voluntary observance of . . . standards of right conduct.’²⁰ ‘I from the influence of thy looks receive / Access in every virtue’ (9.309-10), Adam tells Eve. ‘What is faith, love, virtue unassayed / Alone’ (9.335-36), she responds.

If we do not superimpose Philo’s interpretation fully, we reach a rather symbiotic conclusion. By pruning the plants in Eden, Adam and Eve improve the garden’s virtue: nature ‘by disburdening grows / More fruitful’ (5.319-20). At the same time, the daily work cultivates their own moral sensibility. Theirs is an endless labour: in ‘one night or two’ (211), Eve tells Adam in Book 9, all they cut away will have grown back. Yet both understand their work as a way of remembering God’s kindness. It is a privileged task, an act that declares the distance between man and beast:

other creatures all day long
Rove idle unemployed, and less need rest:
Man hath his daily work of body or mind
Appointed, which declares his dignity,
And the regard of heaven on all his ways;
While other animals unactive range,
And of their doings God takes no account. (4.616-22)

The garden, moreover, acts as an emblem in *Paradise Lost* for the human body and mind. C.S. Lewis long ago supplied the appropriate Freudian reading for the ‘hairy sides’ (4.135) of the mountain beneath Eden.²¹ A. Bartlett Giamatti has handsomely described another kind of affinity, a movement in the garden in which ‘the word for a

¹⁹ *Legum Allegoria* 1.88, in the *Works* (1929-62), Vol. 1, 205.

²⁰ I refer to entries 9b and 2a.

²¹ C.S. Lewis, *A Preface to ‘Paradise Lost’* (London, 1942), 47.

physical fact becomes a metaphor for a mental or spiritual state' — 'mazy' to 'amazed,' the veil of hair to the veil of innocence.²² In Milton's strong presentation of a familiar gardening exercise, the wedding of vine and elm, Giamatti discovers another significant parallel:

they led the vine
To wed her elm: she spoused about him twines
Her marriageable arms, and with her brings
Her dower the adopted clusters, to adorn
His barren leaves. (5.215-19)

The image reminds the reader unmistakably of Adam and Eve's own love. Their embrace in Book 4 glows with a similar sense of fulfilment, Eve's golden tresses covering their naked bodies as they touch. Like the lovers who leave to tend the vineyards in the seventh chapter of the Song of Songs, Adam and Eve keep Eden as a celebration of their own relationship. Eve's ringlets wave 'as the vine curls her tendrils' (4.307), and, like the vine's, hers is a position of married subjection. J.B. Broadbent has written that the couple unites vine and elm as a way of educating nature.²³ At the same time, this horticultural wedding serves as an important reminder for both of them. Their labour produces an image of the proper state of married love.

After the Fall, rural work retains its figurative potency in a variety of metaphors. In Shakespeare's *Richard II*, a good gardener comes to exemplify a good ruler. In England, Richard has failed to 'root away / The noisome weeds' of proud men, who 'without profit suck / The soil's fertility' (3.4.37-38). Had he kept the country 'trimm'd and dress'd,' and lopped away superfluous branches, the king might have kept his crown.²⁴ Bacon suggests that gardening is a means to personal improvement. It is 'the

²² Giamatti, *Earthly Paradise* (1966), 321.

²³ J.B. Broadbent, *Some Graver Subject* (London, 1960), 177.

²⁴ Milton shifts over the metaphor to the government of the Church in the *Animadversions upon the remonstrant's defence* (1641). A 'laborious servant' keeps a 'well-husbanded nursery of plants and fruits': 'Now, when the time was come that he should cut his hedges, prune his trees, looke to his tender slips, and pluck up the weeds that hinder'd their growth, he gets him up to breake of day, and makes account to doe what was needful in his garden . . . Yet for all this there comes another strange Gardener that never knew the soyle, never handl'd a Dibble or Spade to set the least potherbe that grew there, much lesse had endur'd an houres sweat or chilnesse, and yet challenges as his right the binding or unbinding of every

purest of human pleasures,' he writes, 'the greatest refreshment to the spirits of man.'²⁵

John Parkinson, 'first royal botanist' to Charles I, states the position more strongly:

Let men therefore, according to their first institution, so use their service, that they also in them may remember their service to God . . . For truly from all sorts of Herbes and Flowers we may draw matter at all times not only to magnifie the Creator that hath given them such diversities of formes, scents and colours . . . but many more good instructions also to ourselves.²⁶

We may discover the particular quality of the prelapsarian task by reading into *Paradise Lost* the fifth stanza of Andrew Marvell's 'The Garden.' In that poem, Marvell describes himself

Stumbling on melons, as I pass,
Insnares with flow'rs, I fall on grass.(39-40)²⁷

The point, for Marvell, is that this sort of fall has no dire consequence. In such a place, it doesn't make any difference when you accidentally trip over something. The gardening labour in Paradise, on the other hand, is designed to clear away such potential obstacles. By cutting back the bushes and clearing away any stray melons, Adam and Eve nourish in themselves the virtue to guard against sin.

II.

So far, I have offered a conservative account of Milton's Eden. It should have been no surprise to find Paradise so finely ordered, with such bounty available to Adam and Eve, or to discover that Milton seems to have learned from Philo's interpretation of their gardening. In this section, I would like to complicate the picture somewhat. I do not mean to suggest that the Eden that emerges from this second description is the work of a man whose unconscious and conscious minds were at odds, as some have argued;

flower, the clipping of every bush, the weeding and worming of every bed.' The 'laborious servant' is the minister whom Milton would reinstate as the caretaker of the presbytery; the 'strange Gardener' stands for the episcopacy — for bishops who would rule over the seed-plots of men's lives. See *CPW* 1.717.

²⁵ Sir Francis Bacon, 'Of Gardens,' in his *Essays or Councils Civil and Moral*, which appear in the *Works*, ed. James Spedding et al. (London, 1857-74), Vol. 12, 235.

²⁶ John Parkinson, *Paradisi in sole paradisus terrestris* (London, 1629), 3-4.

²⁷ I refer to *The Poems of Andrew Marvell*, ed. Nigel Smith (London, 2003).

nor do I think that there is a covert, and therefore privileged, account of Paradise beneath the traditional landscape we have considered already. Instead, Milton's Eden seems to me rather like a hologram constantly angled around in the light. Perhaps this is the reason T.S. Eliot had so much trouble visualising the place: as we try to reach back to Paradise from the fallen world, we are confronted with several different descriptions that never quite match up. The result, I'm afraid, is that none really satisfies. If the traditional earthly paradise would have bored Milton into sin, the wild, foreign landscape we find elsewhere in *Paradise Lost* provides an equally serious challenge to the poet's project.

In the last section, I suggested that the abundance of Eden serves, for Milton, as a demonstration of God's generosity. By appreciating the beneficence of their Maker, Adam and Eve may be less likely to fall into the devilish sophism of self-creation. I claimed, too, that the gardening labour reminds them of God's kindness. In *Paradise Lost*, however, the divine goodness diffused into the world's enormous bounty is not always as apparent as I have implied. 'Abundance,' for example, is a quality Satan is able to manipulate quite easily. The Tree of Knowledge droops with plenty both times the Fiend tempts Eve. Its scent, he tells her in Book 9, is like that of an animal whose breast strains with too much milk, 'unsucked of lamb or kid, that tend their play' (583). 'O fair plant,' Satan cries in her dream, 'with fruit surcharged / Deigns none to ease thy load and taste thy sweet?' (5.58-59). In the devilish version of divine generosity, it makes no sense that God's bounty, this 'goodly tree . . . loaden with fruit' (9.576-77), should be denied tending and taste. If God does want his kindnesses known, and his magnificence honoured, Eve may even be obligated to eat. 'O fruit divine,' Satan begins,

Forbidden here, it seems, as only fit
 For gods, yet able to make gods of men:
 And why not gods of men, since good, the more
 Communicated, more abundant grows,
 The author not impaired, but honoured more? (5.69-73)

After she has eaten, Eve, for her part, promises to include this tree among her gardening

tasks. Each morning, she will rise and ‘the fertile burden ease / Of thy full branches offered free to all’ (9.801-2).

Such misinterpretations of God’s goodness drew Satan into sin in the first place. In Eden, he will once more pervert divine kindness by thinking the world’s abundance self-generated. ‘This fair earth,’ he tells Eve, abounds with plenty on its own, ‘producing every kind / Them [God and the angels] nothing’ (9.720-22). The Fiend again will choose what Gabriel calls ‘military obedience’ (4.955) over the kind of natural orderliness Raphael describes. Devilish manipulation aside, however, I personally find myself ill at ease with Milton’s account of Eden. Too often, the poet has added details that make the reader uncomfortable. For every fruit fairly plucked and squeezed for unfermented juice, another ‘uncropped falls to the ground’ (4.731); for every tree that weeps odorous gums, another has ‘branches overgrown / That mock’ Adam and Eve’s ‘scant manuring’ (4.627-28). Like chaos, whose allegiances are never certain, prelapsarian nature appears to possess a substantial power of her own. Adam and Eve, as we shall see, are unable fully to rule over her enormous fertility.

Enter Paradise once more with Satan. The garden, the Fiend realises at first sight, contains ‘in narrow room nature’s whole wealth, yea more / A heaven on earth’ (4.207-08). Alastair Fowler identifies these lines as an example of *multum in parvo*, the Baroque ideal of compressing much into a little space.²⁸ Milton, however, has taken the conceit and forced its imaginative limits. How could the earth contain *more* than nature’s whole wealth? Perhaps such richness is incoherent to the fallen mind. We may safely conclude, though, that Eden is very, very full. On several occasions, Milton emphasizes the comparative vastness of Heaven. The single plain on which the angels fall asleep in Book 5 is ‘wider far / Than all this globous earth’ (5.648-49), while the rebels’ party marches through

regions to which
All thy dominion, Adam, is no more
Than what this garden is to all the earth,

²⁸ See the note to *PL* 4.208 in Fowler’s ed. (1998), 228-29.

And all the sea. (5.750-73)

Eden, on the other hand, is narrow and packed with matter. Satan, at one point, wonders how all of Adam and Eve's children will be able to fit there. He offers them Hell instead, a more spacious abode, where 'there will be room / Not like these narrow limits, to receive / Your numerous offspring' (4.383-85). Just after creation, the vine already grows thick, and the reed stands 'embattled in her field' (7.322). In whatever time has elapsed since that day and the moment Satan tenders his offer, the garden has become more luxurious still. No spot remains barren. Flowers, fed by nectar, pour forth

profuse on hill and dale and plain,
Both where the morning sun first warmly smote
The open field, and where the unpierced shade
Embrowned the noontide bowers (4.243-46),

while Raphael, walking through Eden on the following day, finds

A wilderness of sweets: for nature here
Wantoned as in her prime, and played at will
Her virgin fancies, pouring forth more sweet,
Wild above rule or art, enormous bliss. (5.294-97)

This last line has perplexed critics of *Paradise Lost*. The final two feet, 'enormous bliss,' do not quite neutralize the suggestion of the garden's *wildness*: the word recalls chaos, a 'wild abyss' (2.910), and Hell's 'dismal situation, waste and wild' (1.60). 'Virgin' and 'sweet' do not entirely cancel out 'fancies,' either. 'Fancy,' we remember, is the subject of the lesson Adam has completed just before Raphael slides down from Heaven. When we are awake, Adam has told Eve, reason properly proportions the 'airy shapes' generated by fancy from the senses; the mind reforms them into 'knowledge or opinion' (4.105-8). The task is very much like Adam and Eve's gardening. The plants in Eden grow back vigorously when the couple retires in the evening, just as fancy wantons unchecked in dreams when reason is asleep:

Oft in her absence mimic Fancy wakes
To imitate her; but misjoining shapes,
Wild work produces oft, and most in dreams,
Ill matching words and deeds long past or late. (5.110-13)

Danger lurks just beneath the surface of this earlier description. We must, all of us, go to sleep; we cannot be on guard against ‘wild work’ at every moment. The prelapsarian ‘wilderness of sweets’ is potentially even more troubling. Eden grows ‘wild above rule or art’ night *and* day. Their time at work is not enough for Adam and Eve to lop off all the superfluous branches they find, or to cut back every mazy tendril. As it is, they rise with the first streak of sunlight and return to their bower exhausted at midday, he ‘to respite his day-labor with repast, / Or with repose’ (5.231-32). Their task is not toilsome, Eve says, since they garden together, but surely it is hard work. Even so, they cannot keep the garden’s overgrowth completely at bay. To hold Paradise in check, they would need the help of others. So Adam tells Eve just before they go off to bed in Book 4:

With first approach of light, we must be risen,
And at our pleasant labor, to reform
Yon flowery arbors, yonder alleys green,
Our walk at noon, with branches overgrown,
That mock our scant manuring, and require
More hands than ours to lop their wanton growth. (4.624-29)

Such assistance, we learn, will come from Adam and Eve’s offspring. ‘Men,’ Eve tells the serpent in Book 9, will ‘grow up to their provision’: ‘more hands’ will ‘help to disburden nature of her birth’ (9.623-24). In the meantime, however, it seems as if they are waging a losing battle against Eden’s luxurious plant life. Eve and Adam both try to make their gardening efforts appear more successful. He comforts her at the beginning of Book 9 by expressing his confidence that the two of them can manage Paradise alone:

These paths and bowers doubt not but our joint hands
Will keep from wilderness with ease, as wide
As we need walk, till younger hands
Assist us. (9.244-47)

Eve tells the serpent that there is no harm in the overgrowth of this interim period. Uncollected fruit will remain ‘untouched, / Still hanging incorruptible’ (9.622) until there are children to gather it. Their statements elsewhere in *Paradise Lost* belie these assurances. In the evening prayer at the end of Book 4, Adam and Eve praise

this delicious place,
For us too large, where thy abundance wants
Partakers, and uncropped falls to the ground (4.729-31),

while, despite Adam's claims, they are not quite able to reform the garden's 'wilderness with ease.' Raphael, as we have seen, crosses in Paradise a field 'wild above rule or art.' Adam himself says that their 'walk at noon' is cluttered 'with branches overgrown'—branches, and blossoms, and 'dropping gums, / That lie bestrewn unsightly and unsmooth' (4.630-31).

These gardening efforts, then, can only be incremental. When they find 'fruit-trees overwoody' that have 'reached too far / Their pampered boughs' (5.213-14), Adam and Eve prune their branches. With nature's whole wealth crammed inside, however, Eden will always again grow out of control. Perversely, the very act of cutting the garden back makes the situation worse. 'By disburdening,' Paradise 'grows / More fruitful' (5.319-20): removing their excessive branches causes the trees to grow even more vigorously. This is what Eve means when she observes, in Book 9, that 'the work under our labour grows / Luxurious by restraint' (9.208-9). Lest we fear this is a problem that even hordes of working children could not fix, Raphael assures Eve in Book 5 that her womb will eventually outstrip nature's:

Hail mother of mankind, whose fruitful womb
Shall fill the world more numerous with thy sons
Than with these various fruits the trees of God
Have heaped this table. (5.388-91)

These new hands, we may suppose, will make Paradise pour forth a bounty even more profuse. Their number, fortunately, will then be sufficient to ensure that the garden stays pruned.

Earlier, I suggested that Milton rescues from absurdity the job of tending Eden by showing that the task has symbolic merit. Adam and Eve's gardening instructs their moral virtue even as it improves the physical virtue of the trees and flowers. Tillyard, you will remember, criticized Paradise on another count as well. He claimed that Milton would have found it unbearably dull to be stranded there. Once we have recognised the

excessive fertility of Eden, the force of this second charge is greatly diminished. C.S. Lewis liked to imagine the poet himself passing the time by pacing in trim gardens,²⁹ but Adam and Eve do not spend their days in this fashion. They have too much to do. Elms and vines need wedding; overgrown branches must be cut away; nurseries of flowers demand attention. 'Whatever else Milton's Adam and Eve may have been,' J. Martin Evans has written, 'they were certainly not bored.'³⁰

For Evans, the prelapsarian tendency to wilderness is critical to the success of *Paradise Lost*. The basis for this claim is the unusually strong consonance Evans discovers between what he calls 'Adam and Eve's physical relationship to the garden' and 'their own psychological relationship both to their own passions and to each other.' He finds the connection between fruitful virtue and *virtus*, as it were, meaningful even in the poem's details. Like the thick boughs the pair cuts back in Book 5, Eve seeks the 'fruitless embrace' of her own image in the water; her attentions must also be reformed. Adam's upward-tending thoughts, likewise, must be pruned by Raphael in Book 8. Evans argues that Edenic and human perfection share an unexpected fragility. Their continuation rests upon a 'constant vigilance to preserve the balance of forces' on which each depends. If Eden, or man and woman, had been otherwise, he writes, the 'original condition would have been neither free nor happy.'³¹ Adam and Eve must choose to maintain their own happiness. Keep the garden tidy, and make sure that fancy stays within reason's bounds, or you might fall. As evidence of Milton's support for this position, Evans cites a famous passage from *Areopagitica*:

When God gave [Adam] reason, he gave him freedom to choose, for reason is but choosing; he had bin else a meer artificiall *Adam*, such an *Adam* as he is in the motions . . . Wherefore did he creat passions within us, pleasures round about us, but that these rightly temper'd are the very ingredients of vertu? They

²⁹ Lewis, *Preface* (1942), 80.

³⁰ Evans, *Genesis Tradition* (1968), 249.

³¹ Evans, *Genesis Tradition* (1968), 250, 269-71. Barbara K. Lewalski makes a similar point in '*Paradise Lost* and the Rhetoric of Literary Forms' (1985), 196 ff., and also in 'Innocence and Experience in Milton's Eden,' in *New Essays on 'Paradise Lost'*, ed. Thomas Kranidas (Berkeley, 1969), 86-117. See also Scodel, *Excess and the Mean* (2002), 255-56.

are not skilfull considerers of human things, who imagin to remove sin by removing the matter of sin . . . Suppose we could expell sin by this means; look how much we thus expell of sin, so much we expell of vertu: for the matter of them both is the same; remove that, and ye remove them both alike. This justifies the high providence of God, who though he command us temperance, justice, continence, yet powrs out before us ev'n to a profusenes all desirable things, and gives us minds that can wander beyond all limit and satiety. (CPW 2.527-28)

The excess of the garden comes, for Evans, to signify the 'profusenes' of pleasures available to Adam and Eve. Such pleasures, like Eden, possess in themselves nothing malignant. Instead, sin becomes possible when you make a bad choice: when you fail to rein in fancy and disobey reason. In Eden, Evans argues, the difficulty of this task is represented by the vigour with which the garden grows. On this account, Milton has essentially developed Philo's position so that the physical behaviour of Paradise contributes more usefully to its emblematic purpose. The strong growth of the garden itself participates in the symbolic relationship Milton wishes to describe.

Both Evans and Isabel MacCaffrey, who describes Eden in similar terms, begin with the assumption that prelapsarian wildness is merely a danger. 'We are never allowed to forget the threat of the encroaching wilderness,' Evans observes.³² MacCaffrey writes that 'the wilderness is there, waiting to encroach at the slightest neglect': 'its chief effect is to enhance the power and wisdom of Adam, *ruling* the wilderness,' so that Edenic order becomes 'something positive and created.'³³ This last phrase would describe the Garden of Adonis, if only we reversed its coordinates. Instead of replenishing abundance against the opposing force of Time, Adam and Eve maintain Paradise against overgrowth by holding scythes themselves. The primary difficulty with this account is that wilderness, in *Paradise Lost*, does not simply encroach upon Eden: it has already made its way inside. No matter how hard they work, Adam and Eve do not completely rule the garden. Eden tends to wild on its own; it overpowers their attempts at reformation. The garden's twisted branches and mazy vines always remain, even when Adam and Eve show not 'the slightest neglect' of duty. If this

³² Evans, *Genesis Tradition* (1968), 248.

³³ MacCaffrey, '*Paradise Lost* as *Myth*' (1959), 154-55. Emphasis in original.

gardening is a task with the decisive symbolic implications Evans and MacCaffrey describe, then God immediately seems unfair. He has made the job impossible. Without more hands, what are they to do? The implication, if their gardening substitutes meaningfully for the effort to be temperate and rational amid God's 'profusenes,' is much more dangerous. Is that effort also impossible? When you cannot maintain the mental and physical balance appropriate to virtue anyway, why bother trying?

The analogy is worrying for another reason. I mentioned earlier that Eve has trouble understanding that abundance only signifies God's goodness. Satan is able to convince her that His goodness is actually inherent in anything fruitful. It would be a shame, he tells her, not to eat from the Tree's overheavy boughs. If gardening has merit primarily as an emblem of virtue, Eve again mistakes the symbol for the thing itself. Her error begins the fateful conversation at the beginning of Book 9. 'Well may we labour still to dress / The Garden,' she tells Adam,

but till more hands
Aid us, the work under our labour grows,
Luxurious by restraint; what we by day
Lop overgrown, or prune, or prop, or bind,
One night or two with wanton growth derides
Tending to wild. (9.207-11)

Her speech, Christopher Ricks has observed, is full of troubling echoes. *Restraint* recalls the 'one restraint' (1.32) which Adam and Eve transgress, *luxury* the lust that follows immediately after they have eaten. The phrase, Ricks writes, is 'grim with anticipation.'³⁴ It comes as no surprise that the suggestion Eve makes afterward turns out to be a very bad one. Since Eden requires so much pruning, they cannot permit the distraction of working together. They should 'divide [their] labours' instead:

For while so near each other thus all day
Our task we choose, what wonder if so near
Looks intervene and smiles, or object new
Casual discourse draw on, which intermits
Our day's work brought to little, though begun
Early, and the hour of supper comes unearned. (9.220-25)

Unearned is obviously mistaken. Only after he has sinned does Man 'with labour . . .

³⁴ Christopher Ricks, *Milton's Grand Style* (Oxford, 1963), 145.

earn / [His] bread' (10.1054-55). Adam corrects Eve's error immediately: 'not to irksome toil, but to delight / He made us' (9.242-43), he says. God doesn't mind if their work is slightly less efficient because they smile at one another or take 'refreshment, whether food, or talk between' (9.237). The argument then moves on to the question of how best to stand against temptation. The pathetic scene when Eve returns to Adam at noon, however, points back to the first disagreement. He stands near the bower, holding a garland in his hand as he waits for her. Perhaps he has been hard at work winding 'the woodbine round this arbour' (9.216), as his wife suggested, but Adam has found time to stop and make this rural crown for her. Eve, with new plans to trim the Tree of Knowledge daily, hastens back carrying a bough of forbidden fruit, ever a good gardener.

Eve's observation that Eden grows back at night, 'tending to wild,' sounds to Ricks like another ominous hint of what is to come. 'With Eve in it, the garden will certainly tend to wild,' he writes.³⁵ Her sin will shatter the prelapsarian order and cause the earth to groan. Adam, without her, will have to live in what he calls 'these wild woods forlorn' (9.910). 'Tending to wild' becomes an ironic phrase, evidence of Eve's mistaken emphasis on gardening itself, rather than the prophylactic virtue the task is supposed to encourage. The same tension is present just before the serpent approaches in Book 9. In a moment of sadness that nearly stops the heart, Milton describes Eve propping up flowers whose blossoms 'hung drooping unsustained,'

mindless the while,
Herself, though fairest unsupported flower. (9.431-42)

I agree, largely, with Ricks's description of the terrible dissonance latent in 'luxurious by restraint' and 'tending to wild.' My point is that these are physical features of the garden as well as instances of feminine error. They imply that the gardening labour is impossible for Adam and Eve to finish properly — impossible if they work together, she argues, so why should they not try working alone? The question would have had an

³⁵ Ricks, *Milton's Grand Style* (1963), 145.

easy answer if Milton had maintained the description of their labour that he offers in Book 4. No need to work separately, Adam might have said without contradicting himself. Gardening merely provides good exercise, and it is fine to stop once you've broken a sweat:

Under a tuft of shade that on a green
 Stood whispering soft, by a fresh fountain side
 They sat them down, and after no more toil
 Of thir sweet gardening labour than sufficed
 To recommend cool Zephyr, and made ease
 More easy, wholesome thirst and appetite
 More grateful, to their supper fruits they fell. (4.325-31)

As an emblem for practising temperance and right reason, the image would have served without ambiguity. In the books that fall between this moment and Eve's question in Book 9, the symbolic value of the act becomes less obvious. Evans may be right to feel that the suggestions of wildness strengthen the reader's sense of the vigilance required to be good, even in Paradise. With the poet's introduction of powerful overabundance in the garden, however, we become unable to match up both sides of the analogy properly. If the task were manageable — if the savage forest could be kept outside — then all would be well. Milton, of course, could have had it this way. Instead, Adam and Eve are not capable of holding prelapsarian wilderness entirely in check. The emblematic relationship must break down, at this point, lest we infer that it is not their fault that they fall into sin. If the symbolism is inexact, however, we may be less likely to blame Eve for misunderstanding it.

One scholar attributes our fear of Milton's chaos not to an inherent malignancy but instead to a bias that we bring to the poem. We dislike the idea that there might be material untouched by God's providence.³⁶ Two critics have urged readers who are troubled by the fierce growth of the garden to make an equivalent recognition that the difficulty is theirs, not Milton's. Such 'excess can be alarming when we are taught to prefer moderation,' John Knott advises, 'but nature in Eden cannot be too lavish. Its

³⁶ See Corns, *Regaining 'Paradise Lost'* (1994), 100.

energies should be wondered at, not questioned.’³⁷ Arnold Stein has written, in a similar vein, of the ‘authorized excess’ of the garden.³⁸ Whether or not we accept this last phrase, we are left with a serious problem. If Eden’s abundance is not divinely authorized, it cannot serve as the demonstration of divine beneficence for which theologians, Milton among them, have argued. Nature then becomes an independent force in the created world: God may be able to control her if He wants to, but she grows to an ominous superflux in His absence. If such excess *is* authorized by God, it is not any clearer that nature declares His goodness. The garden’s huge abundance makes Adam and Eve unable to subdue the place; its overgrowth lends coherence to Eve’s motive for sin, even if her action does not become legitimate in the process. With much less difficult alternatives available, why make Paradise so fertile that it cannot quite be controlled?

‘Work in the garden . . . is endless,’ Stanley Fish writes at the end of a recent study. ‘Just as no amount of it badly done leaves a situation that cannot be remedied (pruned), so no amount of it well done leaves a situation now free of hazard.’ Or, as he puts it elsewhere: ‘the balance is always at midpoint.’³⁹ The balance, in fact, is weighted against Adam and Eve from the outset. If we are hesitant to agree with Milton’s claim that original matter ‘was good . . . and contained the seeds of all subsequent good,’ it is no clearer that creation achieves the ‘ordered and beautiful’ state that he describes a moment later in *De Doctrina*, or that ‘*God made it ordered and beautiful.*’⁴⁰ We may wonder, as a result, whether it is possible to accept wholeheartedly the ‘epistemological thesis’ that stands at the centre of Fish’s entire view of Milton. This is the claim that the poetry represents a struggle between a world that generates values and meanings of its

³⁷ Knott, ‘Symbolic Landscape in *Paradise Lost*,’ *MS 2* (1970), 41.

³⁸ Arnold Stein, *Answerable Style* (Minneapolis, 1953), 67.

³⁹ Fish, *How Milton Works* (2001), 550, 552.

⁴⁰ *CPW* 6.308. My emphasis.

own and one in which all facts are shaped according to a primary faith in God.⁴¹ Fish writes that Milton's universe, properly understood, is nothing more than 'a homogenous structure of nested boxes . . . each of which, when opened, reveals the same content, an acknowledgment of, and a determination to serve, a benevolent and all-powerful deity.'⁴² The poet of *Paradise Lost*, I think, is not so successful a hedgehog.⁴³

⁴¹ The formal expression of the thesis appears in Fish, *How Milton Works* (2001), 23-24: 'In Milton's prose and poetry, the direction of knowledge is from the inside out. In the world as he conceives it to be, truth and certainty are achieved not by moving from evidence gathered in discrete bits to general conclusions, but by putting in place general conclusions in the light of which evidence will then appear. Rather than confirming or disconfirming belief, the external landscape, in all of its detail, will be a function of belief.' See also *Surprised by Sin* (1997), xvi and 159.

⁴² Fish, *How Milton Works* (2001), 108.

⁴³ I borrow Isaiah Berlin's enduring formulation, which appears in *The Hedgehog and the Fox* (London, 1953), esp. pp. 3-6.

IV : God's Surpassing Hand

As the *Beagle* approached Buenos Aires in 1832, Charles Darwin wrote of the sea: 'The vessel drove before her bows two billows of liquid phosphorus, & in her wake was a milky train. — As far as the eye reached, the crest of every wave was bright, & from the reflected light, the sky just above the horizon was not so utterly dark as the rest of the heavens. — It was impossible to behold this plain of matter, as it were melted & consuming by heat, without being reminded of Miltons description of Chaos & Anarchy.'¹ When he reached land, the scene before Darwin resembled the Eden that Satan discovers at the end of his own voyage in *Paradise Lost*. The diary from the *Beagle* voyage records astonishment at a profusion of fruit trees, insects, worms, flowers 'enough to make a florist go wild'; later, at the Galápagos Islands, hissing tortoises, antediluvian lizards, and, everywhere, fossils. Milton's epic was never far from hand. 'In my excursions during the Voyage of the Beagle,' Darwin wrote in the autobiography he assembled four decades after returning to England, 'when I could take only a single small volume, I always chose Milton.'²

The previous chapter of this study argued that the prelapsarian garden is an uneven emblem in *Paradise Lost*. We may wish, as readers, to find in Eden an unambiguous show of God's generosity, but the poem calls that assertion into question. Nature, like Milton's chaos, appears to possess a force of her own; her powerful fertility undercuts the lessons in temperance and symbol-reading that Adam and Eve are supposed to take away from their rural labour. It is precisely this feature of Paradise, however, that seems to have lodged fruitfully in Darwin's mind. Gillian Beer has described the 'imaginative sustenance' offered by Milton amid the fecundity of the

¹ *Charles Darwin's Beagle Diary*, ed. R.D. Keynes (Cambridge, 1988), 111.

² See *Autobiographies: Charles Darwin and T.H. Huxley*, ed. Gavin de Beer (London, 1974), 49.

tropics. *Paradise Lost*, she argues, helped Darwin to recognize that ‘the green control of the English landscape with its many man-induced harmonies and its sober beauties could not be considered normative.’³ It spurred on the reworking of Malthus that led him gradually to propose the geometrical powers of increase among organic beings as the engine for their variability and change.

Darwin was aware of the inefficiency of the process outlined in *On the Origin of Species*. The making of a woodpecker or a giraffe, he understood, requires heaps of failures, inferior antecedent forms. He wrote in the *Origin* that the natural world sits atop the refuse of an ‘infinite number of generations’:⁴ the superflux of creatures among us, before us, brings about a struggle for existence which only a few can survive. Darwin was especially troubled by the bloodiness of this waste — by the thought, as one of his critics put it, that animals go upstairs on the corpses of their fellows. The turnings-away from the problem in the *Origin* (‘the war of nature is not incessant,’ ‘no fear is felt,’ ‘death is generally prompt’⁵) are too weak for the man who wrote to J.D. Hooker in 1856 to characterize the work he was about to begin. ‘What a book a devil’s chaplain might write on the clumsy, wasteful, blundering, low, and horridly cruel works of nature!’⁶ Alfred Russel Wallace, whose work on speciation forced Darwin finally to set out his theory, raises the same concern. ‘The idea, therefore, that the whole system of nature from the remotest eons of the past — from the very first appearance of life upon the earth — has been founded upon destruction of life, on the daily and hourly slaughter of innocent and often beautiful living things . . . all this is so utterly abhorrent to us that we cannot reconcile it with an author of the universe who is at once all-wise, all-

³ Gillian Beer, *Darwin’s Plots* (London, 1983), 29-30. Interestingly, J.M. Evans suggests that Milton’s own description may draw from accounts of the New World. See *Milton’s Imperial Epic* (Ithaca, NY, 1996), 43-52.

⁴ Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species* (London, 1859), 287.

⁵ Darwin, *Origin* (1859), 79.

⁶ Charles Darwin to J.D. Hooker, 13 July 1856, in *More Letters of Charles Darwin*, ed. Sir Francis Darwin and A.C. Steward (London, 1903), Vol. 1, 94.

powerful, and all-good.’ (Wallace directs particular attention to spiky teeth and beaks and talons, which exist, he says, not to cause pain but to diminish it. Death, by such means, is ‘not only absolutely painless but slightly pleasurable.’⁷)

Excess in the physical universe of Milton’s poems leads to a disquiet about God that is no less urgent. Chapter 1 of this study came upon the difficulty lightly, in the form of a question about the purpose of the chaos that is left behind after the world is given boundaries. In the following pages, I contend that the author of *Paradise Lost* is concerned with the thought that what the Creator has carved out of the first matter of the cosmos may also be superfluous, useless, redundant. This chapter begins by looking at Milton’s Ludlow masque, where function in the physical world is the subject of an argument between Comus and the virgin Lady. The second part returns to *Paradise Lost*, and finds Adam and Eve asking about the worth of an overabundance that perplexes them. It is hard for them to see why God has made the sky so thick with stars, why nature labours to produce fruits that fall to the ground uneaten. We end with the uncertain meditation over purpose in *Samson Agonistes*. Milton, as it happens, refuses the claim that appears as an epigraph to the *Origin*:

Let no man . . . think or maintain, that a man can search too far or be too well studied in the book of God’s word, or in the book of God’s works; divinity or philosophy; but rather let men endeavour an endless progress or proficiencie in both.⁸

This chapter asks how he otherwise makes sense of a book of God’s works that contains so much rubbish.

I.

Near the end of *Comus*, the scene changes to the palace where Circe’s son holds

⁷ A.R. Wallace, *The World of Life* (New York, 1911), 398, 404-6. Richard Dawkins points out in the elegant opening essay of *A Devil’s Chaplain* (New York, 2003, esp. pp. 8-9) that Darwin is similarly bothered by the Ichneumonidae, wasps that paralyse their prey so that their larvae may feed on living flesh.

⁸ Sir Francis Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning*, Book 1, in the *Works*, ed. Spedding (1857-74), Vol. 3, 268.

the Lady captive in an enchanted chair. Before her lie tables covered with a delicious banquet, all the more desirable once we recognize that the Lady has not been succoured by the berries or 'cooling fruit' (186) promised by her brothers. Comus offers a glass of liquor, and reminds the Lady when she refuses it of his ability to harden her body into a statue. She responds with a defence of the mind's liberty. That 'thou canst not touch,' the Lady tells Comus, whatever change you make to 'this corporal rind' (663-64). The tempter relaxes his position. Do not scorn 'the unexempt condition / By which all mortal frailty must subsist' (684-85), he says. Why does she so cruelly deprive herself of nourishment? The covenant between nature and the body requires the Lady to eat. The real fast Comus wishes to compromise is her abstinence from sexual behaviour, of course, and Circe's son quickly recentres his plea after the Lady derides his 'liquorish baits' (699). By succumbing to him, he says, she acts for her own good. To refuse his offer is to waste nature's bounty, to rebuke the cherished blessings of youth. Why, if not to be enjoyed, did 'Nature pour her bounties forth' (709)? Do silkworms weave and gems gleam to no end?

Clever appeals to natural design are a common tactic in seventeenth-century verse that aims to hasten ladies into bed. It is more surprising to find a similar argument in Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*, in which the titular characters are both novices in love when Leander asks Hero to consider 'what difference betwixt the richest mine, / And basest mold, but use?'⁹ The tone is not coy; there is an urgency to the observation that 'honour is purchased by the deedes we do' (280). An unexpected gravity is also present in Shakespeare's 'Venus and Adonis,' when Venus reminds a hesitant Adonis that 'things growing to themselves are growth's abuse' (166). Although Comus's argument goes beyond these traditional forms, his speech to the Lady contains a similar germ of truth. His rhetoric is genuine enough to have left some readers wondering whether Milton's own allegiances have shifted. 'The Lady won the debate,' writes Marjorie

⁹ All citations refer to *The Complete Works of Christopher Marlowe*, ed. Roma Gill et al. (Oxford, 1987-98), Vol. 1.

Nicolson, 'but the poet gave himself away.'¹⁰

Circe's son insists not simply that a string unplayed becomes sour, or that the Lady will one day find herself with grey hair. Her temperance is faulty as well. Such moderation, Comus warns, allows the earth to grow too much. If practised widely, the Lady's 'moral babble' would leave nature 'strangled with her waste fertility':

The herds would over-multitude their lords,
The sea o'erfraught would swell, and the unsought diamonds
Would so emblaze the forehead of the deep,
And so bestud with stars, that they below
Would grow inured to light, and come at last
To gaze upon the sun with shameless brows. (730-35)

In Comus's extraordinary vision, we show ungratefulness to God when we abstain from nature's gifts. An ominous 'waste fertility' results from such sallow forbearance. The ocean, crowded with fish, threatens to violate its separation from the land; birds blot out the sky, animals overrun their masters. The Lady's temperance, moreover, makes the Creator seem like the 'penurious niggard' for whom Satan will later mistake Him. Nature's wealth, Comus says, is not meant to be saved up. The coin of the earth's economy must instead be 'current' (739) — 'in circulation,' in the sense of the Latin participle *currans*, 'running,' full of movement.

The Lady responds by claiming that Comus himself hoards nature's bounty. 'Waste fertility' results not from unused growth but instead from the actions of selfish men who take more than their rightful share. Her speech introduces into *Comus* a second economy, a frugal one, which works against the tempter's argument for current wealth. The earth's fruits are in limited supply, the Lady tells him, and their enjoyment is a zero-sum process. For the abundance one man enjoys, another aches with hunger. Temperance ensures a fair distribution:

If every just man that now pines with want
Had but a moderate and beseeming share
Of that which lewdly-pampered Luxury
Now heaps upon some few with vast excess,
Nature's full blessings would be well-dispensed
In unsuperfluous even proportion,

¹⁰ Marjorie Hope Nicolson, *The Breaking of the Circle* (Evanston, IL, 1950), 161.

And she no whit encumbered with her store. (767-73)

What Comus proposes is gluttony, a swinish ingratitude that dishonours God. Nature appears to be on her side. Although the Lady refuses even to justify the ‘sage / And serious doctrine of virginity’ (785-86) to one so unworthy of its apprehension, she is confident that ‘the brute Earth would lend her nerves, and shake’ (796) if she were to try.

Let us consider, for a moment, the Lady’s description of the distemper that results when nature’s laws are ignored. Its particular characteristic is ‘vast excess,’ a phrase that echoes Gloucester’s plea to the heavens in *King Lear* that ‘distribution . . . undo excess, / And each man have enough’ (4.1.69-70). Why ‘excess’? The word comes into English from the Latin *excedere*, which means literally ‘to go out’ or ‘to depart.’¹¹ When the Lady uses it, the noun ‘excess’ refers specifically to a going beyond: to the surpassing of a limit, to the bounty of which Comus has too much. Yet Milton is fond of retaining the original sense of the word beneath its overt meaning. For the poet, it makes perfect sense that an excessive action should involve the transgression of a limit and also hint at a departure. When God describes Adam and Eve ‘bewailing their excess’ (11.111) in *Paradise Lost*, we realize that the excess they mourn — the violation of God’s single restraint — will soon be followed by the second excess of expulsion from the garden. The double sense also inheres in Milton’s praise of Christ in ‘Upon the Circumcision.’ The Son, he writes, bore ‘the full wrath beside / Of vengeful justice . . . for our excess’ (23-24).

In the same poem, Milton uses the word quite differently to wonder at the redemption made possible by divine kindness. ‘O more exceeding love or law more just?’ he exclaims. ‘Just law indeed, but more exceeding love!’ (16-17). Here we find that God, to match our transgressions, has committed His own: with a generosity that goes beyond His strict decree, God allows His Son to bleed for our sins. This

¹¹ In classical Latin, the word is used regularly in its literal sense. See, for instance, Euryalus’s request in the *Aeneid* that Ascanius console his mother, ‘quam miseram tenuit non Ilia tellus / mecum excedentem, non moenia regis Acestae’ (9.285-86), ‘whom neither the Ilian land nor the walls of King Acestes could keep from going forth (*excedentem*), poor woman, with me.’

‘exceeding love’ offers an implicit answer to Adam’s question in Book 10 of *Paradise Lost*, ‘to the loss of that, / Sufficient penalty, why hast thou added, / The sense of endless woes?’ (752-54). God’s response must be that this fear of deathless suffering is balanced by the possibility of eternal joy. ‘Excess,’ that is, divides its allegiances between two parties. Adam and Eve are left to choose with wandering steps between excessive suffering and excessive bliss. Both paths are open in this new place, a world, after all, created by an excess in the Latin sense of the word. In Milton’s account, you will remember, the first matter of the universe came to exist by going out from God.

‘Vast excess,’ then, may tend towards either Hell or Heaven. With which view should we understand the Lady’s complaint against intemperance? Is nature abundant in the manner of God’s redemptive love, as Comus suggests, wasted unless enjoyed? Or does the tempter instead propose an indulgence in lewd luxury? Neither the Lady nor Comus assists us further in deciding between their positions. She remains silent for the rest of the masque; Circe’s son soon flees from her brothers. If *Comus*, as Rosemond Tuve has written, presents a series of ‘clearly opposed mental positions,’¹² we may feel that neither side in this disagreement is entirely convincing. The attendant spirit endorses the Lady’s position in the epilogue, but Comus is a much better poet. Circe’s son is a known villain and liar, while the Lady never learns the better chastity of married love. Her rescuer, indeed, is a nymph who once chose suicide over the loss of her virginity.

Critics have long argued over Milton’s own loyalties at this moment in *Comus*, and it is not my purpose here to take either side. Instead, I would like to consider how the poet sorts out the same issues in the middle books of *Paradise Lost*. It is surprising that similar questions should even occur to the inhabitants of Eden, which differs so markedly from the wild wood of the Ludlow masque. Both Comus and the Lady argue firmly within the postlapsarian condition, with regard to a realm where men ‘strive to keep up a frail, and feverish being’ (8). Circe’s son advocates a temperance that acknowledges *tempus*, ‘time’; like a withered rose, he says, youth fades and cannot be

¹² Rosemond Tuve, *Images and Themes in Five Poems by Milton* (Cambridge, MA, 1957), 121.

enjoyed again. The Lady's claim is lodged even more clearly in a world of dearth. As she imagines it, the wild wood resembles the stage of *King Lear* more closely than Paradise. Its scarcity requires that the superflux of the powerful be shaken. Eden, on the other hand, lacks neither time nor food, for the hard progress of history has not yet begun.

In the earlier chapters of this study, however, I have tried to call into doubt the assumption that the material universe of *Paradise Lost* glorifies its Creator unequivocally before the Fall. I would now like to look more carefully at the physical makeup of the prelapsarian world. Instead of wondering how Adam and Eve are supposed to care for the garden, I shall consider their efforts to understand its overabundance. Implicit in what follows is John Guillory's description of the 'two incompatible economies' of Paradise: an economy of abundance and unlimited fertility, which takes centre stage in Books 4 and 7, and an economy of frugality and possible wastefulness, which Raphael and Adam introduce into Book 8. I will clarify each of these ideas in the ensuing pages, although you will notice that their difference follows the lines of the argument in *Comus*. For the moment, it must suffice simply to note that, for Guillory, these two economies move in a sequence, like the poem itself. They define what he calls 'a trajectory from the superfluous to the supernumerary': by the end of *Paradise Lost*, he argues, the unneeded proliferation of the garden comes to be 'stigmatized by a new, economic ethos,' which represents 'the real economy of Milton's Paradise.'¹³ This critic's interest, generally, lies with the nascent, outside 'discourses,' like those introduced by seventeenth-century scientific and economic writing, that enter into *Paradise Lost*. In the following pages, I shall take a somewhat different approach and try to show how the two economies Guillory identifies operate in relation to one another within the poem. They contribute, I suggest, to a larger question about God that Adam and Eve have to work out.

II.

¹³ Guillory, 'From the Superfluous to the Supernumerary' (1990), 85 and 78.

awakening to such questions in the *Icaromenippus*. The central figure of the work is Menippus of Gadara, the Cynic philosopher, who tells of the crisis that set upon him when he began to contemplate the universe:

I was caused great perplexity, first of all by what the philosophers call the Cosmos, for I could not discover how it came into being or who made it, or its source or purpose. Then in examining it part by part I was compelled to rack my brains still more, for I saw the stars scattered hap hazard around the sky, and I wanted to know what the sun itself could be. Above all, the peculiarities of the moon seemed to me extraordinary and completely paradoxical, and I conjectured that her multiplicity of shapes had some hidden reason. More than that, lightning flashing and thunder crashing and rain or snow or hail driving down were all hard to interpret and impossible to reason out.¹⁴

Menippus consults the philosophers and finds them long-bearded and full of absurd ideas. He decides to ask Zeus to answer him personally. He severs two wings, one from an eagle, one from a vulture, and uses them to fly towards Heaven. On his way, the moon complains. She is tired of the abuse of men who would know her secrets and pastimes. 'I cannot remain in my place,' she says, unless Zeus 'destroys the natural philosophers, muzzles the logicians, razes the Porch, burns down the Academy, and stops the lectures in the walks.' When Menippus communicates her wishes to the king of the gods, he obeys them to the letter. The philosophers are a 'useless load to the soil.' They say to other men, 'what in Heaven's name do you contribute to the world?', but themselves 'do no good either in public or private life but are useless and superfluous.' To calls from the other immortals ('blast them!', 'to the pit!', 'to the Giants!'), Zeus promises annihilation.

Robert Burton thinks of Lucian when he considers rival theories of celestial movement in *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. The world is 'tossed in a blanket' among the tinkerers and eccentrics, Burton writes; they 'hoist the earth up and down like a ball, make it stand and go at their pleasures,' and thereby risk 'another message to Jupiter . . . to make an end of all those curious controversies.'¹⁵ The message, finally, is patience;

¹⁴ *Icaromenippus* § 4, in the Loeb ed. of Lucian's *Works*, trans. A.M. Harmon et al. (Cambridge, MA, 1913-67), Vol. 2, 275.

¹⁵ Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* 2.2.3, in the Clarendon edition, ed. Thomas C. Faulkner et al. (Oxford, 1990), Vol. 2, 55.

God, on Burton's view, will eventually illuminate these subjects for us. Raphael works with a lighter touch in *Paradise Lost*. The angel tells Adam that men should admire the skies, not seek out their secrets. He imagines the Creator watching in Heaven, but not with a thunderbolt in hand: he is laughing, laughing at the folly of philosophers' disputes. Leave off worrying, 'solicit not thy thoughts with matters hid' (8.168), the angel says. Adam summarizes the lesson after Raphael has finished:

That not to know at large of things remote
From use, obscure and subtle, but to know
That which before us lies in daily life,
Is the prime wisdom, what is more, is fume,
Or emptiness, or fond impertinence,
And renders us in things that most concern
Unpractised, unprepared, and still to seek. (8.191-97)

The encouragement to lowly wisdom, I noted in the last chapter, resembles the suggestions for temperate behaviour elsewhere in *Paradise Lost*. Adam must prune back his thoughts, a labour similar to the work that occupies him during the daytime. As in the *Icaromenippus*, inquiries after the making of the sky are branded as superfluity, nonsense, as serving no purpose in the world. Such knowledge is 'fume,' Adam says, 'or emptiness, or fond impertinence.' The description looks back to Raphael's warning in Book 7 that 'knowledge is as food, and needs no less / Her temperance over appetite.' Surfeit turns 'wisdom into folly, as nourishment into wind' (126-30).

The discussion in Book 8 follows the course of the debate in *Comus*, although Adam is a far more willing pupil than Circe's son. The tempter, we remember, challenges the Lady to describe a moderation that explains nature's 'full and unwithdrawing hand' (711) and does not leave her bounty to rot. Adam is also concerned by waste; he looks above and cannot imagine how the Creator would have allowed such excesses of labour. Milton is giving voice to old questions about the world.¹⁶ The objection, in each case, is turned back upon the inquisitor. The 'waste

¹⁶ *Comus*'s argument draws from a long and varied tradition that begins with the Stoics and their critics. The Lady's response follows Aristotle's disapproval of 'rapacity,' *πλεονεξία* (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1129b). Ancient and contemporary sources for Adam's question about cosmic economy are discussed by Grant McColley, 'The Astronomy of *Paradise Lost*,' *SP* 34 (1937), 213 ff. McColley stakes his claim for the special influence of John Wilkins and Alexander Ross in 'Milton's Dialogue on Astronomy,'

fertility' of Comus's account becomes the 'vast excess' of his own selfish creation, while the angel tells Adam that the superfluity he perceives in the heavens is really the result of his own unbounded questioning.

In *Paradise Lost*, however, Raphael's patient rebuke does not address the initial problem. Unlike the Lady, who suggests that nature might show 'unsuperfluous even proportion' if selfish men took only their rightful share, the angel eventually leaves Adam to think about the concerns of the earth. The worry that an inefficient creation may suggest an incongruous fact about God is not addressed. It is obscured, eventually, by a long stretch in which Raphael dabbles in astronomy and speculates about the three motions of the planets and the unseen rhomb. At the end of the speech, when he has finished wondering about life on the moon, the angel reflects on the possibility that the universe may be barren except for ourselves:

For such vast room in nature unpossessed
By living soul, desert and desolate,
Only to shine, yet scarce to contribute
Each orb a glimpse of Light, convey'd so far
Down to this habitable, which returns
Light back to them, is obvious to dispute. (8.152-57)

Adam is troubled by a nighttime sky that is reeling with energy, sunless, impossibly quick. Raphael's image is closer to the one over which we paused at the end of Chapter 1. It is chillier than Adam's, and more still. Already in Book 8, Raphael has spoken of vastness. Let it stand, he tells Adam, for

The maker's high magnificence, who built
So spacious, and his line stretched out so far;
That man may know he dwells not in his own;
An edifice too large for him to fill,
Lodged in a small partition, and the rest
Ordained for uses to his Lord best known. (8.101-6)

These lines echo the moment in the Book of Job when God's voice is heard for the first time. Reproof rains down like blows upon vexation and complaint; for more than a hundred verses, the air is squeezed out of Job's lungs by the declaration of a superiority

PMLA 52 (1937), 728-62, while Allan Gilbert argues for Galileo's *Dialogo* in 'Milton and Galileo,' *SP* 19 (1922), 152-85.

beyond his understanding. 'Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? . . . Who hath laid the measures thereof if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it?' (Job 38:4-5). Yet Raphael, even as he adds to the record of divine generosity, sounds a note of equivocation. The angel's interpretation of infinite space is hemmed in by an assertion of function. Man, lodged in his nook of the universe, may think of expanses 'ordained for uses to his Lord best known' (8.106).

At this point, it is helpful to recall that Milton answers a question similar to Adam's in a Cambridge debating exercise. The seventh prolusion belongs to his twenty-first or twenty-second year. Milton takes knowledge as his subject; more particularly, he argues for the superiority of Learning over Ignorance. There is a grand moment in which the poet asks the audience to consider the reaches of the soul:

God would indeed seem to have endowed us to no purpose, or even to our distress, with this soul which is capable and indeed insatiably desirous of the highest wisdom, if he had not intended us to strive with all our might toward the lofty understanding of those things, for which he had at our creation instilled so great a longing into the human mind. Survey from every angle the entire aspect of these things and you will perceive that the great Artificer of this mighty fabric established it for His own glory. The more deeply we delve into the wondrous wisdom, the marvellous skill, and the astonishing variety of its creation (which we cannot do without the aid of Learning) the greater grows the wonder and awe we feel for its Creator and the louder the praises we offer him . . . Can we believe, my hearers, that the vast spaces of boundless air are illuminated and adorned with everlasting lights, that these are endowed with such rapidity of motion and pass through such infinite revolutions, merely to serve as a lantern for base and slothful men, and to light the path of the idle and the sluggard here below? Do we perceive no purpose in the luxuriance of fruit and herb beyond the short-lived beauty of nature?¹⁷

The understanding of creation uncovers more glory for God. Whatever you ask of the divine plan, you will learn to say more forcefully with the seraphim, 'holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory' (Isaiah 6:3). Milton makes no distinction between subjects appropriate for inquiry and those that are off-limits. The

¹⁷ CPW 1.291-92. Such rewarding questioning does belong, in *Paradise Lost*, to the angels. Uriel applauds it in Book 3:

Fair angel, thy desire which tends to know
The works of God, thereby to glorify
The great work-master, leads to no excess
That reaches blame, but rather merits praise
The more it seems excess. (694-98)

questions of purpose with which he presses home his point envelop both ends of human experience. In one breath the poet wonders about the stars, fast, distant, unfamiliar, and the vegetation that blooms and withers before our eyes. (One feels that the Milton of the seventh prolusion would have relished the thinking that seizes upon Sir Thomas Browne when he considers pictures of Adam and Eve in the *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*. Supposing that God ordained no parts ‘without use or office,’ should they be drawn with navels? After all, Adam ‘immediately issued from the Artifice of God,’ and Eve ‘anomalously proceeded from Adam.’ If you hold, as Browne does, to the principle that *natura nihil agit frustra*, ‘nature does nothing in vain,’ torrents of bizarre questions rush in. Did Adam have baby teeth? Did the first swallow hatch out of an eggshell?¹⁸)

Raphael, on the other hand, separates knowledge about creation into two categories. One contains information that is not relevant to man, and not to be searched after; the other is defined by what Adam calls ‘things at hand / Useful’ (8.199-200). The angel declares himself partial to no view of the heavens. ‘Whether thus these things, or whether not’ (8.159): what matters is his final dictum, ‘think only what concerns thee and thy being’ (8.174). This answer leaves the reader with neither the Psalmist’s sense of gratitude nor that better knowledge, ‘the more / To magnify [God’s] works, the more we know’ (7.96-97). More troubling is Adam’s feeling afterward that he ought to concern himself wholly with ‘that which before [him] lies in daily life’ (8.192). Have these queries about the stars nothing to do with his enjoyment of the garden? If Adam dreams not of other worlds, will his uncertainty about divine efficiency subside?

Unfortunately, it does not. When Adam’s gaze turns from the luminous nighttime canopy back to the world below, he asks similar questions of his own existence. The additional understanding he has sought from the heavens — extra knowledge, Adam has learned to call it, which ‘renders us in things that most concern / Unpractised, unprepared’ (8.196-97) — turns out to play a crucial role in the everyday

¹⁸ Sir Thomas Browne, *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* 4.5, in the *Works*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (London, 1964), Vol. 2, 345-47.

business of living. Consider, for instance, the way in which Adam thinks about the creation of Eve. When he confesses to Raphael the power of her charms in Book 8, Adam marvels at Eve's outward adornments. He wonders, for a moment, if his inability to refuse her is actually the result of divine error. Perhaps, Adam thinks, God got their proportions wrong:

here passion first I felt,
 Commotion strange, in all enjoyments else
 Superior and unmoved, here only weak
 Against the charm of beauty's powerful glance.
 Or nature failed in me, and left some part
 Not proof enough such object to sustain,
 Or from my side subducting, took perhaps
 More than enough; at least on her bestowed
 Too much of ornament, in outward show
 Elaborate, of inward less exact. (8.530-39)

The loss of the particular rib taken to fashion his wife, Adam muses, may have left behind a permanent deficiency. The wound in his side may have been too wide. In *Paradise Lost*, Geoffrey Hartman observes, 'the price for communion with created bounty is, paradoxically, partial sacrifice of that bounty.'¹⁹ To correct the 'deficiency' (8.416) he discovers when he finds himself alone, Adam must contribute a piece of his own body. In Book 9, faced with a choice between obedience and sin, Adam recoils at the prospect of another injury. 'Should God create another Eve, and I / Another rib afford,' he tells his wife, 'yet loss of thee / Would never from my heart' (9.911-13).

Adam, however, remains unsure how to regard that part of himself which he has been able to give up. After the Fall, he suggests bitterly that the rib taken from his chest must have been lesser, crooked, a 'part sinister' — 'well if thrown out,' he says, 'as supernumerary / To my just number found' (10.887-88). This last remark touches upon theological conundra beyond this study. The wishful entreaty that follows, 'why did God . . . not fill the world at once / With men as angels without feminine' (10.888, 892-93), suggests the kind of problem with which Leibniz grapples early in the

¹⁹ Geoffrey Hartman, 'Adam on the Grass with Balsamum,' *ELH* 26 (1969), 174.

Theodicee.²⁰ Here, it is enough to observe that Adam neglects an obvious explanation for the rib, one familiar to us already from the Psalmist's approach. Either a lost rib leaves behind a permanent deficit, or it is 'well . . . thrown out' — Adam's better off not having something he doesn't need. But couldn't God's 'hands so liberal' (8.362) have extended their generosity to the material of the body? Why not consider the possibility that the extra rib was neither defective nor essential to Adam's function?

This sort of oversight is characteristic of Satan's view of the world, of an infernal mind that is either frightened of or unable to grasp God's limitless generosity and omnipotent hand. The Fiend balks at the divine power that brings forth 'infinite goodness' (1.128) and is tormented by 'infinite wrath, and infinite despair' (4.74); he casts off a 'debt immense of endless gratitude' only to be swallowed up in 'endless misery' (1.142). One tactic by which Satan wards off his sense of God's unbounded power is to see the new earth through the lens of divine efficiency, circumscribing its Creator to the rule of ends. So does he tempt the dreaming Eve in Book 5 with moonlight, which 'shadowy sets off the face of things in vain / If none regard' (5.43-44); so does he wonder at the command, 'suspicious, reasonless' (4.516), to forego the food of the Tree of Knowledge. Why, he asks Eve, does the Tree bear fruit at all if they are not to eat from it? The question rings with overtones from the debate in the Ludlow masque. Like Comus, Satan is arguing against the 'waste fertility' of the Tree, and he repeats, in his description, the threatening fertility that characterizes Comus' speech. As we saw in the last chapter, the Tree's branches hang with 'fruit surcharged' (5.58), smelling like the unsucked breast of a ewe. On the other hand, Satan sometimes seems to think of God's creative energy in the same way that the Lady in *Comus* views nature's bounty, as a quantity in limited supply. The Fiend suggests at one point that

²⁰ The issue, a subject of many centuries of discussion, is whether or not a perfect God could create anything but a perfect world. In such arguments, apparently trivial matters, like the status of Adam's extra rib, become very significant. Andrew Willet, in his *Hexapla . . . Sixfold Commentary on Genesis* (London, 1608), writes that the rib was 'supernumerary . . . not as a superfluous or monstrous part, but as necessary for the creation of the woman.' See Alastair Fowler's note on lines 884-88 in his edition of *Paradise Lost* (1998), 588.

God decided to form man because He had not the strength to shape more angels — ‘such virtue of old now failed’ (9.144). Why, then, would He bother to make something that Adam and Eve cannot enjoy?

Behind this question is a grave mistake about the prohibition in the garden, one that Milton is careful to clear away in *De Doctrina*. ‘The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil was not a sacrament, as is commonly thought,’ he writes, ‘for sacraments are made to be *used*, not abstained from; but it was a kind of pledge or memorial of obedience.’²¹ With the first taste of sin, however, Adam and Eve fall into the same infernal logic that misleads Satan. Eve wonders why she ignored this delicious tree for so long, ‘hitherto obscured, infamed, / And thy fair fruit let hang, as to no end / Created’ (9.797-98). Adam follows a similar line of argument soon afterward when he bemoans the slow approach of death. To what purpose do I continue to breathe, he asks,

Why delays
His hand to execute what his decree
Fixed on this day? Why do I overlive,
Why am I mocked with death, and lengthened out
To deathless pain? (10.771-75)

Why, Adam wonders, has God not yet struck him down? Eve suggests that they take matters into their own hands by committing suicide. ‘Let us make short, / Let us seek death’ (10.1000-1). It is a strange business, this deathless death, but Adam quietly answers her plea for self-destruction. Her horror at the thought of standing any longer, ‘shivering under fears’ (10.1003), shows ‘anguish and regret / For loss of life and pleasure overloved’ (10.1018-19). ‘Why do I overlive’ has become, in an sense, ‘why do I overlove’: Adam’s answer, like Raphael’s cautions about the stars and the Lady’s admonition, causes the burden of the superfluous to turn inward.

Earlier in *Paradise Lost*, however, Adam has not responded to his wife’s concerns with the same intelligence. His own question about the stars, we should remember, actually originates with Eve, who wonders why the lights are kept on after they fall asleep. ‘Wherefore all night long shine these, for whom / This glorious sight,

²¹ CPW 6.352. My emphasis.

when sleep hath shut all eyes?' (4.657-58), she asks Adam. As lovely as it is, his answer runs in the wrong direction. Instead of resting upon the sort of position which the Psalmist adopts, that these lanterns glow as a sign of God's generosity and attention, Adam chooses a more difficult path:

These then, though unbeheld in deep of night,
Shine not in vain, nor think, though men were none,
That heaven would want spectators, God want praise:
Millions of unseen spiritual creatures walk the earth
Unseen, both when we wake, and when we sleep. (4.674-78)

Perhaps, he suggests a few lines earlier, the stars prepare the earth for the sun's virtuous rays. Perhaps they prevent night from regaining her perpetual hold. His answer, in any event, allays only the particular concern at hand. Adam does not dispute that Eve has cause to worry about divine economy. He never suggests that the premise behind her question is faulty, that God's works should not be held to the standard of efficiency she has introduced. Adam's failure to correct her in this manner provides Eve with the rhetorical ground to assert cogently, in Book 9, that she is self-sufficient. 'What is faith, love, virtue unassayed / Alone,' she asks Adam, 'without exterior help sustained?' How could God have left us 'so imperfect' (335-38) that we are unable, each of us, to stand by ourselves against temptation? Adam advises her not 'to think superfluous others' aid' (9.308), but her mind is made up. 'In herself complete' (8.548) she seems to him already: why should she *need* his help? Adam has no argument to prohibit her departure.

My point is that Raphael's caution in Book 8 does not address the basic problem that motivates Adam's question about the stars. God may have left the heavens' fabric for man as a luminous intellectual playground, as the angel tells Adam; its exact movements may 'import not' (8.70). But the disproportions and superfluity above also characterize this earth. For man and woman 'to know / That which before [them] lies in daily life' (8.193), they must understand that God is Himself capable of a wonderful sort of excess. They must come to terms with the inefficiency of creation.

It is fitting that the same concerns creep into the dim surroundings of *Samson Agonistes*. More than two centuries ago, Samuel Johnson complained of the trappings

that draw attention away from the failure of Milton's play. *Samson Agonistes* 'must be allowed to want a middle,' he wrote, 'since nothing passes between the first act and the last, that either hastens or delays the death of Samson . . . The whole drama, if its superfluities were cut off, would scarcely fill a single act.'²² The final section of this chapter argues that the part of the play which Johnson calls a superfluity is, itself, a meditation on superfluity. The middle of *Samson Agonistes* takes up a question of purpose. Experiencing what the chorus calls 'causeless suffering' (701), and haunted by defeat, Samson wonders, of life, 'to what end should I seek it?' (522). All the while, locks tumble down upon his shoulders, and the old strength is felt.

III.

The catalogue of wherefores at the start of *Samson Agonistes* ends, unexpectedly, with a question about the human body. The Nazarite feels that the mechanism of vision is flawed in its design. It is too simple to blind a man:

why was the sight
To such a tender ball as the eye confined?
So obvious and so easy to be quenched,
And not as feeling through all parts diffused,
That she might look at will through every pore? (93-97)

Samson shows no interest in distinguishing between spiritual illumination and the receptiveness of the eyes to external stimuli. Outward and inward darkness have arrived together; his is not the fortune of the prophet Tiresias, whose blindness, Milton writes in 'De Idea Platonica,' 'gave him piercing sight' (*profundum lumen*, 25). Samson follows instead the monist philosophy defended at length in *De Doctrina*, where Milton shows that the soul is created from matter.²³ The Nazarite presses this view to its conclusion. Supposing it is true 'that light is in the soul, / She all in every part' (91-93), he asks, why are we unable to see through our feet and elbows? William Kerrigan and John

²² *Rambler* 139, in the Yale edition of *The Works of Samuel Johnson*, ed. E.L. McAdam Jr. et al. (New Haven, 1958-2005), Vol. 4, 376.

²³ *CPW* 6.322: 'Nearly everyone agrees that all form — and the human soul is a kind of form — is produced by the power of matter' (*ex potentia materiae produci*).

Rogers point out that the angels, in *Paradise Lost*, possess this ability.²⁴ They are ‘all head, all eye, all ear, / All intellect, all sense’ (6.351).

Fragile vision is accompanied by what Samson considers to be a feebleness of intellect. For an ‘impotence of mind, in body strong’ (52), he also requires an explanation:

yet why?
Immeasurable strength they might behold
In me, of wisdom nothing more than mean;
This with the other should, at least, have paired,
These two proportioned ill drove me transverse. (205-9)

Samson does not understand why sight should be shut up in the eye and is confused by a body that totters under the direction of an unexceptional brain. In both cases, the concern is with an imbalance, an error in divine allocation. (The condition is worse for women. The chorus wonders later in the play whether ‘such outward ornament’ was ‘lavished on their sex . . . that inward gifts were left for haste unfinished’ [1025-29].)

Onto this world there is imposed a familiar demand for frugality, and a discomfort with superfluity, as waste. It is most clearly in evidence during Samson’s conversation with Manoa, when the Nazarite worries that death charges none too swiftly. Eyeless, bound with fetters of brass, he would know of the divine hand that allows him to talk and suffer. Are these long days a form of penance, a payment for sin?²⁵ Life, in this state, merely offers further evidence that Heaven’s fingers apportion their gifts sloppily:

Now blind, disheartened, shamed, dishonoured, quelled,
To what can I be useful, wherein serve
My nation, and the work from heaven imposed,
But to sit idle on the household heath,
A burdenous drone. (563-67)

Samson has resolved to act while he awaits the gentle coming of darkness. Unable to work towards his nation’s deliverance, he would rather sweat than fall into the numbness

²⁴ William Kerrigan, *The Sacred Complex* (Cambridge, MA, 1983), 210, and John Rogers, ‘The Secret of Samson Agonistes,’ *MS 33* (1997), 120-21.

²⁵ See ll. 488-91: ‘Let me here / As I deserve, pay on my punishment; / And expiate, if possible, my crime, / Shameful garrulity.’

of old age. He resists the suggestion, first from Manoa and then from the chorus, that rest and boredom might better advance Israel's hopes, which are ill-served, after all, by his exertions for the Philistines. By toil 'honest and lawful' (1366), he subsists.

It is possible to hear in Samson's defence of labour an anxiety with roots in the same soil as Adam's question about the stars. 'To what can I be useful?' (564), he wants to know. This concern sits behind Samson's description of himself, in line 567, as a 'burdenous drone.' The word *drone* has a well-known figurative sense as a term for a 'lazy idler' or 'non-worker,'²⁶ but the Nazarite's use of the noun is more direct. He tells the audience at the beginning of *Samson Agonistes* of

restless thoughts, that like a deadly swarm
Of hornets armed, no sooner found alone,
But rush upon me thronging (19-21),

and decries the 'thoughts . . . armed with deadly stings' that 'mangle [his] apprehensive tenderest parts' (623-24). Unless he chooses to be a man of 'laborious works' (14), Samson tells the chorus, he has no part in the world of the Philistines. He is like the male honey-bee, driven out from the 'wondrous pageant' (*admiranda spectacula*) of Virgil's apian city:

namque aliae victu invigilant et foedere pacto
exercentur agris; pars intra saepta domorum
narcissi lacrimam et lentum de cortice gluten
prima favis ponunt fundamina, deinde tenacis
suspendunt ceras; aliae spem gentis adultos
educunt fetus; aliae purissima mella
stipant et liquido distendunt nectare cellas;
sunt quibus ad portas cecidit custodia sorti,
inque vicem speculantur aquas et nubila caeli,
aut onera accipiunt venientum, aut agmine facto
ignavum fucos pecus a praesepibus arcent. (*Georgics* 4.158-68)

(Some watch over the gathering of food, and under fixed covenant labour in the fields; some, within the confines of their homes, lay down the narcissus' tears and gluey gum from tree bark as the first foundation of the comb, then hang aloft clinging wax; others lead out the full-grown young, the nation's hope; others pack purest honey, and swell the cells with liquid nectar. To some it has fallen by lot to be sentries at the gates, and in turn they watch the rains and clouds of heaven, or take a load of incomers, or in martial array drive the drones, a lazy

²⁶ These definitions appear under the second entry for the noun in the *OED*.

herd, from the folds.)²⁷

Samson has been ‘cast off,’ abandoned to his enemies, he says, ‘as never known’ (641). He finds no role for himself in the deliverance of Israel. The wound is reddened by the memory of a pillar of fire, of angels descending and a promise.

The Latin word for ‘drone,’ *fucus*, is related to the verb *fucare*, ‘to dye’ or ‘to colour.’ The noun, when it does not refer to a bee, usually signals a pretence or sleight of hand. It can refer to the trickery of an orator.²⁸ Pliny writes that drones are sham bees: sterile (he believes) and without stings, they are imperfect, *imperfectae*, and incomplete, *inchoatae*.²⁹ When Samson considers his own body, he puzzles over a different physical problem, one of surplus or excess. The Nazarite cannot account for the return of his curls.³⁰ He finds ‘redundant locks / Robustious to no purpose clustering down, / Vain monument of strength’ (567-70).

Ordinarily, for Milton, *redundant* smells of Hell. He uses the adjective in *Paradise Lost* to describe Satan’s disguise as a serpent: scaly folds rise and fall in the manner of the sea, ‘redundant’ (9.503), as waves that surge and, breaking, turn back on themselves. The movement is a figure for sin, which starts with pride and ambition, until the illusion collapses and God again is discovered to be peerless. When rebellion rang through Heaven, Raphael tells Adam and Eve, evil ‘soon / Driv’n back redounded

²⁷ The translation is by H. Rushton Fairclough, in the Loeb ed. of Virgil’s *Works* (New York, 1916-18), Vol. 1. The lines about the drone expulsion reappear in full at *Aeneid* 1.434-35. Virgil’s description of the drone is very much alive to writers in this period. Thomas Elyot’s *The Book named The Governour* announces, for example, that the bee is ‘a perpetual figure of just government or rule.’ If ‘any drone, or other unprofitable bee, entereth into the hive,’ he is ‘immediately expelled’ (Bk. 1, Ch. 2, in Arthur Turberville Eliot ed. [Newcastle, 1834], 10). The Archbishop of Canterbury accords a harsher fate to the drone in Shakespeare’s *Henry V*. He compares the ‘divers functions’ of man to the work of honey bees: their emperor ‘surveys . . . The sad-eyed justice with his surly hum / Delivering o’er to executors pale / The lazy yawning drone’ (1.2.197-204).

²⁸ See the fourth and fifth entries in the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (Oxford, 1968), Vol. 1, 741.

²⁹ Pliny, *Naturalis Historia* 11.11.27, in the Loeb ed., trans. H. Rackham et al. (Cambridge, MA, 1938-63), Vol. 3, 449. Pliny, unlike Virgil, describes a function for *fuci* in the hive: they are ‘the servants of true bees, who consequently order them about, and drive them out first to the works, punishing laggards without mercy.’

³⁰ This surprising occurrence is announced in Judges 16:22, ‘The hair of his head began to grow again after he was shaven.’

as a flood on those / From whom it sprung' (7.56-57). By a similar motion, the sea of reeds is said to have drowned the Egyptian party. These rises and falls have a function. The angels sing of it to God in Book 7:

who seeks
To lessen thee, against his purpose serves
To manifest the more thy might: his evil
Thou usest, and from thence creat'st more good. (613-17)

The Father makes more life out of destruction. Since evil exists in the world, Heaven puts it to use; the work of Satan is not wasted. What troubles Samson is the absence of such a reason for the regrowth of his hair. It is 'redundant . . . to no purpose' (568-69). The locks are 'robustious,' full of *robur*, firmness, as hard wood,³¹ but their power only reminds him of what he once was. The curls falling upon his shoulders are a 'vain monument of strength' (570).

Samson, before his capture, was part of the rubbishing business. He rendered worthless the might of armies, 'made arms ridiculous, useless the forgery / Of brazen shield and spear' (131-32). He charged on regiments and 'with a trivial weapon,' a jawbone, 'felled / Their choicest youth' (263-64). In imagining the dying ahead, Samson reasserts a sense of economy. The dregs of the world will do the work themselves, he says:

Here rather let me drudge and earn my bread,
Till vermin or the draff of servile food
Consume me, and oft-invocated death
Hasten the welcome end of all my pains. (573-76)

Samson imagines refuse swallowing refuse. Scavenging creatures or crumbs will lay waste to him. The process of disintegration begins while the Nazarite still lives. He rots, he says, hauling around a body 'dead more than half' (79), with 'wounds immedicable' that 'rankle, fester, and gangrene' (620-21).

Manoa replies to his son with a radical confidence in the ways of Heaven. The

³¹ 'Robustious' suggests that Samson's hair is strong in itself, not simply as a symbol of the Nazarite's covenant with God. Manoa presents the same claim when he describes 'locks / That of a nation armed the strength contained' (1493-94). The problems associated with this view are discussed by Rogers, 'The Secret of *Samson Agonistes*' (1997).

old man at first advises inaction. It is best, he says, to ‘lie at home bed-rid,’ ‘idle, / Inglorious, unemployed, with age outworn’ (579-80), for Samson’s labour only assists his enemy. Yet Manoa, too, cannot help but trust in a purpose for the return of his son’s strength. The belief makes him certain that sight will also be restored:

God, who caused a fountain at thy prayer
From the dry ground to spring, thy thirst to allay
After the brunt of battle, can as easy
Cause light again within thy eyes to spring,
Wherewith to serve him better than thou hast;
And I persuade me so; why else this strength
Miraculous yet remaining in those locks?
His might continues in thee not for naught,
Nor shall his wondrous gifts be frustrate thus. (581-89)

How is the audience supposed to react to this prediction? Perhaps we are meant to nod with recognition at the faint echo of John 9, where Jesus anoints the eyes of a blind man with clay and gives him vision. The man afterward worships the Son of God. ‘Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind,’ he tells the Pharisees; ‘if this man were not of God, he could do nothing’ (John 9:32-33). Nevertheless, they refuse to trust in a prophet who is a sinner and does not keep the Sabbath. All this is woven into a wider narrative of divine intention. At the beginning of the story, the disciples ask about the man who is healed: was it he who sinned, ‘or his parents, that he was born blind?’ Jesus answers:

Neither this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him. / I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work. (John 9:3-4)

Manoa thinks of the injuries to Samson in a similar light. When the Nazarite sees again, he will ‘serve [God] better than [he] hast.’ The blinding becomes part of a plan that they understand only as it is rolled out before them. Heaven, Manoa feels sure, will not allow the ‘wondrous gifts’ bestowed on Samson to go to waste. ‘His might continues in thee not for naught.’

Is this crazy, or not? The question becomes more pressing at the end of the play, when Manoa reaffirms his theory:

I persuade me God had not permitted

His strength again to grow up with his hair
 Garrisoned round about him like a camp
 Of faithful soldiery, were not his purpose
 To use him further yet in some great service,
 Not to sit idle with so great a gift
 Useless, and thence ridiculous about him.
 And since his strength with eyesight was not lost,
 God will restore him eyesight to his strength. (1495-1503)

This is obviously wrong; Samson lies dead among the pillars. It is harder to decide where Manoa goes astray. He presents two conclusions: the return of strength means that God has a purpose in store for Samson, first; second, that the Nazarite's eyesight will also come back. Is he incorrect on both counts? Perhaps it is that Manoa is a fool, that he 'speaks nonsense,'³² with unfounded certainty in a skein of divine gift and divine purpose. Equally plausible, however, is the view that Samson's father judges the situation correctly. He errs only in his selection, among many options, of the circumstances of divine use. 'God . . . will not long defer / To vindicate the glory of his name / Against all competition' (473-76), Manoa says early in the play. He assumes that this plan involves the restoration of vision, but once he learns of the disaster, the puzzle of curls and strength and Heaven's vindication is made clear. 'Samson,' now, 'hath quit himself / Like Samson' (1709-10).

The matter of the hair appears again in Samson's confrontation with Harapha. It is often said that this section of the play marks the start of Samson's restoration; the enemy rouses him, and gives the Nazarite 'the opportunity to reaffirm his faith in the true source of power, God Himself.'³³ A brief review of the exchange will be instructive. Samson starts off by telling Harapha that the tilting furniture of battle would make no difference if they were to fight. A wooden staff would be enough for him. Harapha

³² The phrase is Joseph Wittreich's, in *Interpreting 'Samson Agonistes'* (Princeton, 1986), 319. Wittreich is thinking of the ransom negotiations of which the old man gives report; Milton, he argues, is parodying the bargain of the Atonement, so that Manoa's claim that 'death . . . Hath paid [Samson's] ransom now' (1572-73) forms part of an elaborate antiperistasis between *Samson Agonistes* and *Paradise Regained*.

³³ See Michael Lieb, *Milton and the Culture of Violence* (Ithaca, NY, 1994), 257. This is also the view of Anthony Low, *The Blaze of Noon* (New York, 1974), and Mary Ann Radzinowicz, *Toward 'Samson Agonistes'* (Princeton, 1978).

replies by saying that the force he is able to channel into brigandine and habergeon is, at least, his own. Samson's comes from a sorcerer or magus:

Thou durst not disparage glorious arms
Which greatest heroes have in battle worn,
Their ornament and safety, had not spells
And black encroachments, some magician's art,
Armed thee or charmed thee strong, which thou from heaven
Feign'dst at thy birth was given thee in thy hair,
Where strength can least abide, though all thy hairs
Were bristles ranged like those that ridge the back
Of chafed wild boars or ruffled porcupines. (1130-38)

When Samson responds that what looks like magic is a gift from Heaven, Harapha changes his tune. It is evident, even if Samson is right, that the Hebrew God has no use for him any longer. The Nazarite has been tossed away and forgotten:

Thee he regards not, owns not, hath cut off
Quite from his people, and delivered up
Into thy enemies' hand, permitted them
To put out both thine eyes, and fettered send thee
Into the common prison, there to grind
Among the slaves and asses thy comrades,
As good for nothing else, no better service
With those thy boistrous locks, no worthy match
For valour to assail, nor by the sword
Of noble warrior, so to stain his honour,
But by the barber's razor best subdued. (1156-67)

Much is objectionable in this review of the events that have led to Samson's bondage. Harapha removes from the Nazarite the tincture of guilt for the sequence of babble and shears. He skips over the very real confusion that marks the scene of capture in the Judges narrative: the arresting moment at which we are told that Samson 'wist not that God had departed from him.'³⁴

We recognize, nevertheless, that Harapha's taunt is cast on one side of the debate we have traced through *Comus* and *Paradise Lost*. He accepts that Samson's Creator can abandon his gifts, so that the evidence of returning strength in the prison ('those thy

³⁴ The statement is surprising because Samson has told Dalilah that he will become weak if his head is shaven. Twice the story informs us that 'he told her all his heart.' Samson, however, seems unaware of what must happen once the deed is done. He meets his enemies as before, shakes himself (*v'ina'âr*). Scholars inform us that the verse in Judges is likely the work of a second writer. To Judges 16:19, 'his strength went from him' (*yasar co'ô mâ'alav*), a complementary phrase is added: the Lord 'was departed from him' (*sar mâ'alav*, Judges 16:20). On this point, see Cuthbert Aikman Simpson, *Composition of the Book of Judges* (Oxford, 1957), 63.

boistrous locks') only confirms the view of Samson as a type of trash, having no use. The Nazarite, in a striking reversal of the stance he has taken earlier,³⁵ insists that the issue be put to proof. He will demonstrate his continued role in God's plan by fighting Harapha. They will

By combat . . . decide whose god is God
Thine or whom I with Israel's sons adore. (1177-78)

Later, he sees the 'great act' (1389) before him, fulfils the 'part from heaven assigned' (1217). Whether the conclusion of the drama shows Samson to be a figure for Christ,³⁶ or a man of 'radical ecumenical faith,'³⁷ or instead a 'hero-saint' degenerating before our eyes,³⁸ the concern that the hair is merely a superfluity turns out to have been misplaced. Harapha's speech erases it homeopathically:³⁹ told he is a mere excess, Samson finds a use for himself.

What is not possible any longer is the certainty about God's plan that was available before the Nazarite's error. Among the rabbis, there is the story that, when the Lord was with him, Samson's locks would dance: 'his hairs became stiff and knocked one against another like a bell, and their clang travelled as far as from Zorah to Esthael.'⁴⁰ At the end of *Samson Agonistes*, no sound or outward movement provides evidence of Heaven's involvement. Instead, the Nazarite acts according to what the

³⁵ See ll. 461-62, where Samson says, with some relief, that 'all the contest is now / 'Twixt God and Dagon.'

³⁶ The case is made by F. Michael Krouse, *Milton's Samson and the Christian Tradition* (Princeton, 1949).

³⁷ Radzinowicz, *Toward 'Samson Agonistes'* (1978), 349.

³⁸ Wittreich, *Interpreting 'Samson Agonistes'* (1986), 343.

³⁹ Milton writes in the Argument to *Samson Agonistes* that tragedy treats the passions as 'in physic things of melancholic hue and quality are used against melancholy, sour against sour, salt to remove salt humours.' One attempt to extend this homeopathic strategy to the structure of the play appears in Georgia Christopher, *Milton and the Science of the Saints* (Princeton, 1982), 230-42.

⁴⁰ *Midrash Rabbah* (1939), Vol. 2 (*Shemot*), 102-3. The remark is Rabbi Na'man's, and results from a fortuitous word-play. The verb of Judges 13:25, 'the Spirit of God began to move him' (*le-fa'amo*), is related to the noun *pa'amon*, 'bell.'

chorus, earlier, has called a 'self-satisfying solution' (306). *Samson Agonistes* has been compared to 'On the Morning of Christ's Nativity.' In the early poem, 'the children were invited to play on the grass; in *Paradise Lost*, even in *Paradise Regained*, there were prohibitory notices, but still a certain number of children disregarded them unchecked; in *Samson Agonistes* the park is perfectly ordered with notices complete and the children have departed for good.'⁴¹ The play's final chorus, borrowing a formula from Euripides, denies the Philistines the power to resist God's 'uncontrollable intent' (1754). We have no opportunity to consider what this phrase might mean — who, after all, has ever presumed to think divine intent controllable? — before the scene in Gaza goes dark.

⁴¹ Tillyard, *Milton* (1930), 344.

V : Causes and the World's Quiet Limit

'Hee happen'd to be bury'd in Cripplegate, where about thirty year before hee had by chance also interr'd his Father.'¹ For a short time, a stone marked the grave, but it was removed, or stolen, and the church was changed. When parishioners decided to build a memorial for Milton, more than a century later, they no longer knew where to find the body. In 1790, during repairs to the building, a search was permitted. A lead coffin thought to be Milton's was found, but it had no inscription or date, and 'with a just and laudable piety' was returned to the ground.

The following day, the coffin was disinterred for a second time. A group of men split it open with a chisel and discovered the corpse, enveloped in a shroud, with 'the ribs standing-up regularly.' They tore it apart for relics, taking hair, bones, and skin, as well as the teeth, which resisted 'until some one hit them with a knock with a stone.' For a fee ('the price of a pot of beer') members of the public were allowed to view what remained of the body.² Water got into the coffin and made a foul sludge. Later, the rector of the church sued his parish for a tithe of the proceeds. A London newspaper expressed astonishment: 'What indignation would our Poet, a determined enemy to Church-establishments, have expressed at the idea of being himself considered as a *titheable* commodity!'³

Milton wrote in an early poem that he would keep an eye on the world once he reached 'the ethereal home' of the gods:

¹ John Phillips, *Life of Milton* (1694), in *Early Lives*, ed. Darbishire (1932), 34.

² These details are gathered from Philip Neve's account, in *A Narrative of the Disinterment of Milton's Coffin* (London, 1790), 14, 17-21. The identity of the remains is open to conjecture; many contemporary observers were not convinced the body was Milton's at all.

³ *St. James's Chronicle*, 4-7 September 1790. An interesting account of the controversy surrounding these events can be found in Corrie Leonard Thompson, 'John Milton's Bones,' *NQ* 7th S. 9 (1890), 361-64.

Secreti haec aliqua mundi de parte videbo
 (Quantum fata sinunt) et tota mente serenum
 Ridens purpureo suffundar lumine vultus
 Et simul aethereo plaudam mihi laetus Olympo.

(I shall watch this earth and its affairs — as much, that is, as the Fates permit — from some corner of that far-off world, and, with all my soul calmly smiling, a bright red blush will spread over my face, and I shall joyfully applaud myself on ethereal Olympus.)⁴

It is just as well that, by the end of his life, he expected oblivion. Of the intervening time between death and judgment, Milton writes in *De Doctrina* that it will ‘be as nothing’; to ‘those who have died . . . it will seem that they die and are with Christ at the same moment’ (CPW 6.410). Nevertheless, one wishes to know what this poet, who was moved by the fate of Osiris, would have thought of the desecration of his grave. Would he have been appalled, or merely unsurprised by the lowness of the human race?⁵ Would he have said, as he does in *De Doctrina*, that the body is lifeless (*inanimatum*), and sat back calmly at the completion of its inevitable dissolution?

In the night season, we think of Milton, and of the mute inglorious Miltons who lie elsewhere, undisturbed. The pieces left over from a life arrest us; we contemplate dust and bone, and seek a reason for our strivings and animation. Before man’s disobedience, before death, what kinds of questions about the motive for creation are possible? This chapter looks at Adam’s concern in *Paradise Lost* about a world that, like Eden, contains ‘variety without end’ (7.542). Stanley Fish has observed that the phrase hangs between two possible meanings: variety without *limit*, or variety without *purpose*?⁶ We consider the vast sweep of matter made available by divine *excessus* — hostile and unloved, much of it, but also made use of for flowers, the hippopotamus, for woman and man — and what issues forth is a doubt like Mr. Prendergast’s, in *Decline*

⁴ ‘Mansus,’ ll. 97-100. William Cowper borrows different lines from the poem in his ‘Stanzas on the late Indecent Liberties taken with the Remains of the Great Milton’ (1790).

⁵ The second suggestion is A.N. Wilson’s, in *A Life of John Milton* (Oxford, 1983), 259.

⁶ Stanley Fish, *Surprised by Sin* (1997), xx.

and Fall. 'Why did it all begin?'⁷

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Near the middle point of *Paradise Lost*, with 'half yet . . . unsung' (7.21), Milton sings of origins: 'how and wherefore the world was first created.'⁸ These are questions of the late afternoon. Raphael has filled the hotter hours with stories of sapphire and gunpowder. Adam begs him now to stay. To hear of beginnings the sun will postpone his plunge, or the moon and stars will rush in with interested ears. Sleep will hold off until the tale has ended. 'Deign to descend now lower,' Adam asks,

and relate
 What may no less perhaps avail us known,
 How first began this heaven which we behold
 Distant so high, with moving fires adorned
 Innumerable, and this which yields or fills
 All space, the ambient air wide interfused
 Embracing round this florid earth, what cause
 Moved the creator in his holy rest
 Through all eternity so late to build
 In chaos, and the work begun, how soon
 Absolved, if unforbid thou mayst unfold
 What we, not to explore the secrets ask
 Of his eternal empire, but the more
 To magnify his works, the more we know. (7.84-97)

This request cannot be surprising to the angel. When Adam, earlier in the poem, wishes to know 'what . . . hath passed in heaven' — no less than 'the full relation' — Raphael understands the story to include not just 'the invisible exploits / Of warring spirits' and the rout of the defeated, but also the lineage of 'another world,' with 'secrets . . . perhaps / Not lawful to reveal' (5.554-56, 565-70).

Adam remembers the last item in Book 7. He repeats Raphael's word, *secrets*

⁷ See Evelyn Waugh, *Decline and Fall* (Boston, 1928), 38-39: 'You see, it wasn't the ordinary sort of Doubt about Cain's wife or the Old Testament miracles or the consecration of Archbishop Parker. I'd been taught how to explain all those while I was at college. No, it was something deeper than all that. *I couldn't understand why God had made the world at all* . . . You see how fundamental that is. Once granted the first step, I can see that everything else follows — Tower of Babel, Babylonian captivity, Incarnation, Church, bishops, incense, everything — but what I couldn't see, and what I can't see now, is, *why did it all begin?*'

Later in the novel, his head is sawed off.

⁸ Argument to Book 7.

(7.94), slippery and unfamiliar to him.⁹ Does he also recollect the angel's mention, in the same passage in Book 5, of a time when 'this world was not' (5.572)? Indeed, a *time* — 'for time, though in eternity,' Raphael says, 'applied / To motion, measures all things durable / By present, past, and future'?'¹⁰ Patrick Hume thought so. He described the question in Book 7 as an inquiry about the timing of creation. Adam asks not 'how and wherefore' but 'how and when.' 'What cause / Moved the creator . . . so late to build / In chaos': the subject is the tardiness of the world ('so late'), its advanced date. Of the infinite number of moments available to Him, why did God choose this one? Aristotle found the problem intractable, and used it in the *Physics* to argue for the sempiternity of the cosmos.¹¹ 'Why not sooner?' is the criticism he directs against Anaxagoras's view that there was a period of rest before movements began in the heavens. If these motions were not eternal, Aristotle asks, on what basis could they ever start?¹² He argues instead for a radically different picture: a world everlasting, starry locomotion without beginning or end; the principle of movement an unmoved mover, who 'causes motion as being an object of love.'¹³ Hume sees all of this coming. He perceives in 'so late to build' the groundwork for the Aristotelian objection, and

⁹ It is the first time Adam or Eve uses the word, which is at the centre of the poem's description of sin. The rebels' dark conferences, the foe in the garden — all 'secret,' supposed hidden from God. Eve shares in the fallacy after she eats from the Tree. 'I perhaps am secret' (9.811), she thinks, before wondering what disguise to put on for Adam.

¹⁰ *PL* 5.577, 580-82. In *De Doctrina*, Milton finds 'no reason' to think that 'motion and time . . . could not, according to our concepts of "before" and "after," have existed before the world was made' (*CPW* 6.313-14), and in *Paradise Lost* a Heavenly day and night exist before the creation of earth and sky. Maurice Kelley is unsure in his note for the *CPW* whether Milton has consulted Aristotle's *Physics*, to which I refer below. The reference to the *Physics* in Milton's discussion of death later in the first book of *De Doctrina* (*CPW* 6.409-10) provides strong evidence that he has. Aristotelian ideas about time also appear in Milton's second poem on the death of Hobson the Carrier, where they provide the central conceit: 'time numbers motion, yet (without a crime / 'Gainst old truth) motion numbered out his time' ('Another on the Same,' 7-8).

¹¹ I begin with Aristotle, but Richard Sorabji, *Time, Creation and the Continuum* (London, 1983), 232 ff., traces the question back several centuries further, to Parmenides.

¹² Anaxagoras's claim appears at *Physics* 250b.23-27. Aristotle responds at 252a.10-20.

¹³ κινεῖ δὲ ὡς ἐρώμενον; see *Metaphysics* 1072b, in the Loeb ed., trans. G. Cyril Armstrong (1933-35), Vol. 2, 147.

understands that the question leads to an ‘impious and absurd Demand’: ‘why God did not make the World co-eternal with Himself.’ The critic of *Paradise Lost* is well prepared by the poem. Matters such as these, Hume writes, are not ‘within the compass of human comprehension’:

Why God was not pleased to create the World 100000 Years before he did, and how employed his infinite Power, Wisdom, and other unaccountable Perfections before the Creation, are some of those vain and Atheistical Enquiries of impertinent and daring Men, who, little acquainted with the turns and motions of their own frail and unruly Wills, would pry into the Secrets of the Eternal Mind, and ask an account of that Almighty Will, which created all things how and when he pleas’d.¹⁴

The disapproval of men who presume to understand the actions of the Creator, while being unable even to know ‘the turns and motions of their own frail and unruly Wills,’ looks forward to the easier lesson Adam repeats to Raphael in the next book of *Paradise Lost*. To search ‘with wandering thoughts’ for the secrets of the heavens, he tells the angel, is to ignore what touches one’s self, ‘and renders us in things that most concern / Unpractised, unprepared, and still to seek’ (8.196-97).

Milton is less ready to heed his own advice. In *De Doctrina*, he declares that ‘anyone who asks what God did before the creation of the world is a fool’ (CPW 6.299). Later in the same chapter, however, it does seem possible at least to say that He was making the angels and sending some of them to Hell. All this ‘took place before even the first beginnings of this world’ (CPW 6.313). *Tetrachordon* adds to the list of divine occupations. God ‘conceals not his own recreations before the world was built; *I was, saith the eternall wisdome, dayly his delight, playing alwayes before him.*’¹⁵ Urania, too, was often present. So Milton writes in the lines that precede Adam’s question:

heav’nly born,
Before the hills appeared, or fountain flowed,
Thou with eternal wisdom didst converse,
Wisdom thy sister, and with her didst play
In presence of the almighty Father, pleased
With thy celestial song. (7.6-12)

¹⁴ Hume, *Annotations* (1695), 214.

¹⁵ CPW 2.596-97. The quotation is from Proverbs 8:30.

These speculations complicate the sly disavowal elsewhere of questions of timing. In *Tetrachordon*, Milton writes of certain ‘ecclesiastical stories,’ in which ‘one demanding how God imploy’d himself before the world was made, had answer; that he was making hel for curious questioners.’ The reply, following the strategy we observed in Chapter 2, serves as an example of ‘a certaine forme of indignation usual among good authors; wherby the question, or the truth is not directly answer’d, but som thing which is fitter for them, who aske to heare’ (CPW 2.663). The Pharisees have earned this kind of response. Adam has not. He is not a ‘curious questioner,’ at least not in the sense that the remarks in *Tetrachordon* suggest. His request in *Paradise Lost* is cautious, made, indeed, with *cura*, ‘care,’ and open to improvement by it. Adam takes pains *not* to be ‘curious’ in the sense the *Oxford English Dictionary* calls ‘condemnatory,’ as one who is ‘prying,’ ‘unduly inquisitive.’¹⁶

In the *Confessions*, Augustine recollects the same tale that furnishes Milton with his example of salutary dismissiveness. For the earlier man, the derisive response covers over what he sees as a serious theological misjudgment. ‘I would have preferred him to answer, “I am ignorant of what I do not know,”’ Augustine writes, ‘rather than to reply so as to ridicule someone who has asked a deep question and to win approval for an answer which is a mistake’ (C 11.14). To ask about God’s actions and whereabouts before creation is mistakenly to assume that God exists in time. The correction of this error occupies the centre of the eleventh book of the *Confessions*.¹⁷ When the same issue arises again in *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, Augustine enriches his line of

¹⁶ The *OED* concedes that *curious* ‘has been used from time to time with many shades of meaning.’ (Many of these are gathered together when Marvell writes of a ‘curious peach’; see ‘The Garden,’ l. 37.) This discussion compares the first entry in the *OED*, ‘careful,’ ‘studious,’ ‘attentive,’ to the fifth — ‘inquisitive,’ but ‘with condemnatory connotation.’

¹⁷ Augustine concludes that time cannot have existed before the world; they ‘were created simultaneously’ (*City of God* 11.6, trans. R.W. Dyson, Cambridge, 1998). Without the notions of ‘before’ and ‘after,’ questions about divine occupation turn into nonsense. ‘If time did not exist before heaven and earth, why do people ask what you were then doing? There was no “then” when there was no time’ (C 11.15). The position is discussed in Simo Knuutila, ‘Time and Creation in Augustine,’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. Norman Kretzmann and Eleanor Stump (Cambridge, 2001), 105-7, and in Etienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of Saint Augustine*, trans. L.E.M. Lynch (London, 1961), 189-96.

thought by raising a second issue. He begins with matters of timing: ‘what was [God] doing before he made heaven and earth? And why did he suddenly decide to make what he had not previously made through eternal time?’ Then, however, Augustine asks the reader to consider another question. ‘Suppose . . . they do not say, “Why did God suddenly decide to make heaven and earth?”’ Remove the word *suddenly*, in other words, and a bald problem remains. “‘Why did God decide to make (*quare fecit Deus*) heaven and earth?’¹⁸

The two concerns are related in a well-known passage in Lucretius, of whom Virgil wrote that he was able ‘to know the causes of things.’¹⁹ In the fifth book of *De Rerum Natura*, Lucretius uses both questions to discredit the thought that the world is a contrivance of the gods:

quid enim immortalibus atque beatis
 gratia nostra queat largiri emolumentum,
 ut nostra quicquam causa gerere adgrediantur?
 quidve novi potuit tanto post ante quietos
 incitare, ut cuperent vitam mutare priorem? (5.165-69)

(For what largesse of beneficence could our gratitude bestow upon beings immortal and blessed, that they would attempt to effect anything for our sakes? Or what novelty could so long after entice those who were tranquil before to desire a change in their former life?)

A similar shift of attention is possible in *Paradise Lost*. Most modern editors of the poem follow Hume in understanding ‘so late’ to introduce a worry about divine delay. Merritt Hughes and Alastair Fowler both take Adam to be interested in God’s timing. For Hughes, the question resembles those of ‘many a mediaeval schoolman and rabbi.’ Fowler finds it absurd, as though Adam were ‘asking like a child what moved the prime mover.’²⁰ Milton’s own summary of these concerns is slightly different. Before Adam

¹⁸ Augustine, *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* 1.2.3, trans. Roland Teske (Washington, DC, 1991). It is worth noting that this work adds a second solution to the ‘why not sooner?’ problem. Augustine follows Origen in asserting the timeless creation of a world of patterns. See Sorabji, *Time, Creation* (1983), 233-34 and 249-52.

¹⁹ *Rerum cognoscere causas*, in *Georgics* 2.490.

²⁰ Milton, *Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (New York, 1957), 348, and *Paradise Lost*, ed. Fowler (1998), 394.

speaks, the poet prepares the reader by listing the subjects to come. Adam is

Led on, yet sinless, with desire to know
 What nearer might concern him, how this world
 Of heav'n and earth conspicuous first began,
 When, and whereof created, for what cause. (7.61-64)

The majority interpretation of 'so late,' following Hume, collapses the 'when' and 'what cause' into a single question. Why did God choose *this* moment? The broader intimations of purpose, which we expect from 'what cause,' never emerge. Yet 'tardy' and 'delayed' do not cover all the senses of 'late.' Common among the poets is another meaning: 'recently,' or 'not long since.' Where we expect 'lately,' it is not unusual to find Milton truncating the adverb to avoid the short syllable. John Leonard has noted that 'so late' often does mean 'so recently' in *Paradise Lost*. This sense is evident when Adam mourns 'the end / Of the new glorious world, and me so late / The glory of that glory' (10.720-23), and when the fallen pair leaves Eden, 'so late their happy seat' (12.642). Leonard proposes that the reader substitute 'so recently' for 'so late' in Book 7. All of a sudden, it appears as though Adam is really asking about creation from his own perspective. 'What cause, / Moved the creator so late': why did God create, and 'so recently,' with respect to *me*?²¹ Like Augustine's expulsion of 'suddenly,' this reading clears away the clouds of divine occasion and lets in another question. Adam's query finds a second face. It 'amounts to "Why creation," not just "Why creation now?"'²²

To a mind like Augustine's, the two problems are similar. Concerns about the selection of a particular moment for creation become nonsense, he argues, once it is seen that moments did not exist before God created them. With first motives it is the same. Those who ask 'why creation?' wish 'to know the causes of the will of God, though the

²¹ John Leonard, 'Language and Knowledge in *Paradise Lost*,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Milton*, ed. Dennis Danielson (second ed., Cambridge, 1989), esp. 103-4. Thinkers in Milton's day speculated often about the age of the earth — its existence, that is, with respect to theirs; one common estimate put it at 6,000 years. For examples, see C.A. Patrides, *Milton and the Christian Tradition* (Oxford, 1966), 28.

²² Leonard, 'Language and Knowledge' (1989), 104.

will of God is itself the cause of all that exists.’ Inquiries about the intentions of the cause of causes all lead to the same dead end. ‘One who asks “Why did God make the heaven and earth?” should be told, “Because he willed to” — *quia voluit*. Press the question further — ask, ‘Why did God *will* to create heaven and earth?’ — and you slam up against Omnipotence. A person who asks these things ‘is looking for something greater than the will of God.’ But ‘nothing greater can be found.’²³

Quia voluit leaves behind an odd taste, as though Augustine has answered a question that is not quite the one we asked. Part of the problem is the narrow view of ‘why’ that he adopts. Augustine limits answers to those that fall under Aristotelian definitions of causation. What caused God to create? His will. What caused God’s will to create? There are no causes beyond God! It is ‘as if the question were, “What is related to God’s will as his will is related to creation?”’²⁴ Most persons who wonder about the purpose of the heavens and earth will not agree to so foolish an analogy. Their search is not for an agent beyond God but for an inner motive, a reason. Is Augustine prepared to conclude that God is incapable of acting upon reasons, and to take a large step thereby towards voluntarism?²⁵ It appears not; for elsewhere his account of divine motive swings back in the opposite direction, towards a determinist view.²⁶ In the eleventh book of the *City of God*, Augustine presents a second explanation for creation. This one comes out of his efforts to grasp the sense of ‘God saw the light, that it was good’ (Genesis 1:4):

²³ *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* 1.2.4, trans. Teske (1991). A similar discussion appears as a response to the twenty-eighth question (‘why would God want to create the world?’) in *De diversis quaestionibus*. ‘One who asks why God would want to create the world inquires about the cause of God’s will. Every cause that has an effect is greater than what is produced by it. Yet nothing is greater than the will of God.’ What is Augustine’s conclusion? *Non ergo eius causa quaerenda est*, ‘therefore the cause of [God’s will] should not be sought.’ See *PCC* Vol. 40, Col. 18. The translation is my own.

²⁴ See Norman Kretzmann, ‘A General Problem of Creation,’ in *Being and Goodness*, ed. Scott MacDonald (Ithaca, NY, 1991), 209-10.

²⁵ For sources of the view that Augustine is a voluntarist, see Roland Teske, ‘The Motive for Creation according to Saint Augustine,’ in *The Modern Schoolman* 65 (1988), 337 n. 17.

²⁶ On this point see Klaus Kremer, ‘Das “Warum” der Schöpfung,’ in *Parusia*, ed. Kurt Flasch (Frankfurt, 1965), 257-59.

If the intention of Scripture had been only to tell us Who made the light, it would have been enough to say, ‘God made the light.’ And if it had wished us to know not only Who made the light, but by what means it had been made, it would have been enough to announce, ‘And God said: Let there be light, and there was light,’ that we might know . . . that He made it by His Word. But because it was fitting that three great truths regarding the creation should be intimated to us — that is, *Who made it, by what means, and why* — Scripture says: ‘God said, Let there be light, and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good.’ If, therefore, we ask Who made it, the answer is ‘God.’ If we ask by what means He made it, the answer is that He said ‘Let it be,’ and it was. And if we ask why He made it, the answer is because ‘it was good.’²⁷

This reply also seems meagre. Again we feel that Augustine has failed to answer the question he has put before himself. ‘It was good’ is an attribute of creation, like wetness is an attribute of rain. To the question ‘why does it rain?’, we are unlikely to be satisfied with the answer ‘because rain is wet.’ If we are after what Aristotle calls the purpose (ἔνεκα) of rain, its true explanation (αἰτία), it will not do even to take another step, and say that it rains because ‘the rising vapour must needs be condensed into water by the cold, and must then descend.’ No; for to argue in terms of physical necessity is no different from answering, ‘it rains by chance,’ that is to say, accidentally.²⁸ The condensation of vapour is a process undirected by purpose, and it is not open to direction. Suppose we wish to say, as Aristotle does, that it rains in order that corn can grow. The phase changes of water molecules tell us nothing of this. These events just as easily produce the opposite outcome: fields are flooded, crops are washed away.

Plato accepts a similar distinction between purpose, on the one hand, and necessity or accident.²⁹ It is surprising, therefore, to find ‘because creation is good,’

²⁷ *City of God* 11.21, trans. Dyson (1998). Emphasis mine. Roland Teske, ‘The Motive for Creation’ (1988), 246-47, lists other passages in Augustine in which similar claims appear. Teske is attentive to the variances in Augustine’s thought, but for the purposes of this discussion I take up the most general version.

²⁸ See Aristotle, *Physics* 198b-199b.

²⁹ See, for example, *Timaeus* 47e-48e, one of the places in which Plato describes an ‘errant’ or ‘irresponsible cause,’ πλανωμένη αἰτία. He has just distinguished between the physical processes that bring about vision, and the purpose ‘for the sake of which’ (47a) we have eyes. Recall also Socrates’s reaction in the *Phaedo* to Anaxagoras’s theory of causes. Socrates asks: why am I sitting here, in my last days? Anaxagoras would say ‘that I am now sitting here because my body is composed of bones and sinews, and the bones are hard and have joints which divide them and the sinews can be contracted and relaxed,’ whereas ‘the real causes . . . are, that the Athenians decided that it was best to condemn me, and therefore I have decided that it was best for me to sit here’ (97c-e). In the Loeb ed.,

which sounds no more promising than ‘because rain is wet,’ at the centre of the motive he ascribes to the Demiurge, or Craftsman, in the *Timaeus*.³⁰ The goodness of an ordered cosmos lies close to the reason (αἰτία) for its becoming:

Let us state the reason why: He was good, and one who is good can never become jealous of anything. And so, being free from jealousy, he wanted everything to become as much like himself as was possible. In fact, men of wisdom will tell you . . . that this, more than anything else, was the most preeminent reason for the origin of the world’s coming to be. The god wanted everything to be good and nothing to be bad so far as that was possible. (*T* 29e-30a)

Of this argument, Arthur Lovejoy writes that it introduces ‘into European philosophy and theology the combination of ideas that for centuries was to give rise to many of the most characteristic internal conflicts, the logically and emotionally opposing strains, which mark its history.’³¹ It is at the heart of a work that Benjamin Jowett, casting his eye over Plato’s *oeuvre*, called ‘the most obscure and repulsive to the modern reader.’³² To summarize the view of divine intent in the *Timaeus*, we need to begin with the Good, which, for Plato, is separate from the ataraxy and shadow of creatures like ourselves. ‘The essence of “good” . . . lies in self-containment,’ Lovejoy writes, and he quotes the *Philebus*: ‘whatever living being possesses the good always, altogether, and in all ways, has no further need of anything, but is perfectly sufficient.’³³ Aristotle, on Lovejoy’s account, follows this line of thought to its end and makes the God of the *Eudemian Ethics* an Introvert. Plato, on the other hand, stumbles over the thought that goodness is not compatible with envy (φθόνος). ‘One who is good can never be jealous of anything,’ *Timaeus* says. ‘Free from jealousy,’ and with the receptacle of becoming

trans. Fowler (1914), 339-41.

³⁰ In the following discussion, I am greatly indebted to Francis Cornford’s study of the *Timaeus*. See *Plato’s Cosmology* (London, 1935), esp. 160-177.

³¹ Lovejoy, *The Great Chain* (1936), 40.

³² See Jowett’s introduction to the *Timaeus*, in *The Dialogues of Plato*, Vol. 3 (third ed., Oxford, 1892), 341. This paragraph does not appear in later editions of Jowett’s translation.

³³ *Philebus* 60c, in the Loeb ed., trans. Fowler (1925), 375.

before him, the Demiurge acts. He imposes order, desires to make 'everything . . . as much like himself as possible.' For him to refuse to do so would demonstrate ill-will. Such a failure would be incompatible with a goodness that is, by definition, without envy. 'Because it was good,' thus understood, is not quite so empty an answer as it first appears. It suggests that the world's goodness is the work of the Good, which acts upon matter out of a freedom from jealousy — out of an inclination to make 'everything be good and nothing . . . be bad so far as that was possible' (*T* 30a).

Augustine nods more directly at the argument of the *Timaeus* in another work. He explains the motive for creation again in *De Genesi ad litteram*, the longest of his commentaries on the book:

We are in our measure a good coming from God, who made all things exceedingly good, including ourselves. There is no other good thing apart from God that He did not make, and therefore He needs no good outside of Himself because He needs not the good He has made. This is His rest from all the good works He has wrought.

Of what good things could God fittingly feel no need if He had created none? For He also might be said to need no good outside of Himself not by resting in Himself from His creatures but simply by making no creatures at all. But if He were unable to create good things, He would have no power; if He were able but did not do so, He would be filled with envy. Therefore, because He is all-powerful and good, He made everything exceedingly good; but because He is perfectly happy in His own goodness, He rested in Himself from the good things He had made.³⁴

In these remarks, the two strains of Platonic thought are evident. First, there is the assertion of a self-sufficient Creator. 'He needs no good outside of Himself.' Augustine then reverses his conception: 'Of what good things could God . . . feel no need if He had created none?' As in the *Timaeus*, the world is the work of a Creator without *invidentia*, 'envy.' Possessing the strength to fashion other goods, He does not refuse them. In this way, God may be said to *feel* no jealousy. This state is unavailable to a Being who remains at rest, makes 'no creatures at all,' and has nothing towards which jealousy is

³⁴ *De Genesi ad litteram*, 4.16.27, trans. John Hammond Taylor (New York, 1982). The Latin appears in the *PCC*, Vol. 34, Col. 306-7.

possible. Still, we may wish to ask: if this is so, how can He be said to create *freely*?³⁵ Augustine's God masterminds the whole operation. The Demiurge of the *Timaeus* is not the source of the receptacle and must persuade a recalcitrant matter to accept his control. The God of *De Genesi ad litteram*, on the other hand, is responsible for everything. If He is not to show envy, everything must be.

What does Raphael have to say about these matters in *Paradise Lost*? It would be almost correct to answer: nothing. For the most part, the angel remains silent. By the end of Book 7, 'what cause' is forgotten, and Raphael's recapitulation of the query in the book's final lines does not even include it:

And thy request think now fulfilled, that asked
How first this world and the face of things began,
And what before thy memory was done
From the beginning, that posterity
Informed by thee might know. (635-39)

Perhaps the absence is deliberate. Earlier in the poem, Uriel admits that even angels are ignorant of the class of questions we have been considering. 'Wonderful indeed are all [God's] works,' he tells Satan, who has come to learn of the world; but 'what created mind can comprehend . . . the wisdom infinite / That brought them forth, but hid their causes deep' (3.702-7)? Uriel, who thinks his listener an angel, has no reason for silence or prevarication. Raphael is more cautious when he addresses lower ears. It is tempting to include the answer to 'what cause?' among 'things not revealed' — to count it among the information 'which the invisible king, / Only omniscient, hath suppressed in night, / To none communicable in earth or heaven' (7.122-24).

Raphael, for the most part, does not take this approach. Preceding his warnings about knowledge, there is praise, and a promise to Adam. 'This also thy request with caution asked / Obtain' (7.111-112). The narrative of Book 7, indeed, offers several rival theories of divine motive. In the Argument, we read that God 'declared his pleasure to create another world.' *Pleasure* echoes Revelation 4:11, 'thou hast created all things,

³⁵ This problem is at the centre of Lovejoy's story; he describes an 'absolute cosmic determinism,' ignored by 'a perennial recalcitrance' of the Western mind. See Lovejoy, *The Great Chain* (1936), 54-55.

and for thy pleasure they are and were created,' as well as God's insistence, in Book 3, that man is free: 'what pleasure I from such obedience paid' (107)? The claim is reminiscent of the voluntarist position that emerged, briefly, in our discussion of Augustine. In Book 8, Adam adds, as a corollary, that God is unmoved by necessity. 'No need that thou / Shouldst propagate, already infinite' (8.419-20).

God Himself stands behind a second view. He tells the angelic legions that His intent is to sour any sense of devilish triumph:

But lest his heart exalt him in the harm
 Already done, to have dispeopled heaven,
 My damage fondly deemed, I can repair
 That detriment, if such it be to lose
 Self-lost, and in a moment will create
 Another world. (7.150-55)

There is a whiff of suspicion about this declaration. The devils in Book 1— are they to be believed? — report of a world rumoured long before their rebellion.³⁶ Still, God's reasoning leaves an impression on Adam, who uses a similar argument when he puts himself in the Creator's boots in Book 10. Should he father children? 'What if *thy* son / Prove disobedient, and reprov'd, retort, / Wherefore didst thou beget me?' (10.760-62). But their descendants may crush Satan; that 'would be revenge indeed,' Adam tells Eve; and these deserts 'will be lost,' he says, should they choose death, 'or childless days' (10.1037).

A third argument comes from the host of Heaven. The angels rejoice at the plan to create, and announce that God desires to sow glory —

instead
 Of spirits malign a better race to bring
 Into their vacant room, and thence diffuse
 His good to worlds and ages infinite. (7.188-91)

Two ideas are at work in this passage. The angels first assert that the aim of creation is to install 'a better race' where the third part of Heaven once stood. The thought is similar to God's, when He says that He will 'repair / That detriment,' even though 'heaven yet

³⁶ 'Space may produce new worlds; whereof so rife / There went a fame in heaven that he [God] ere long / Intended to create, and therein plant / A generation' (1.650-53).

populous retains / Number sufficient to possess her realms' (7.146-53). In Book 5, Raphael provides the details of the process. He speaks to Adam and Eve of the slow ascent by which every object of creation may return to its Maker:

one almighty is, from whom
 All things proceed, and up to him return,
 If not depraved from good, created all
 Such to perfection, one first matter all,
 Indued with various forms, various degrees
 Of substance, and in things that live, of life;
 But more refined, more spirituous, and pure,
 As nearer to him placed or nearer tending
 Each to their several active spheres assigned,
 Till body up to spirit work, in bounds
 Proportioned to each kind. (5.469-79)

With this claim in mind, consider the angels' second statement in Book 7. God will 'thence diffuse / His good to worlds and ages infinite' (190-91). *Thence?* It is not clear how a permanent dissemination of goodness is part of the divine plan. 'Diffuse / His good' is heavy with echoes of Plato, for whom the motive for creation is generosity or its negative, a desire to demonstrate the absence of envy. Like the Demiurge, the God of *Paradise Lost* plants glory outside Himself. At the same time, however, He plans for its reabsorption. The descendants of Adam and Eve will eventually rise and fill the 'vacant room' once inhabited by the rebels.

Let us return, briefly, to Raphael's account of the creaturely procession upward in Book 5. 'Refined,' in line 475, is an odd choice. The word refers to the process in metallurgy by which an element is separated from unwanted, extraneous substances. When 'refine' is used figuratively in early modern writing, it continues to signal a purification. Spenser uses the word in this way in his 'Hymn in Honour of Beauty,' where 'refine' describes the moment after death at which the soul is separated from the body:

And to gross matter of this earthly mine,
 Which clotheth it, thereafter doth refine,
 Doing away the dross which dims the light
 Of that fair beam which therein is empight. (46-49)

Michael, in *Paradise Lost*, refers to the Last Judgment in similar terms. God, he says,

will raise 'from the conflagrant mass, purged and refined, / New heavens, new earth' (12.548-49).

'Refine' tends to refer to the removal of tainted, impure matter. What about 'purge,' the other word Michael uses in Book 12? Its meaning seems to be close to that of 'refine.' Speaking to the Son, God supplies the verb to describe Adam's expulsion from Eden:

Those pure immortal elements that know
No gross, no unharmonious mixture foul,
Eject him tainted now, and purge him off
As a distemper, gross to air as gross,
And mortal food. (11.50-54)

Belial uses 'purge' in the same way to argue against a second attempt on Heaven. Even if they should break through the realm of night, he tells the fallen party in Book 2, 'the ethereal mould . . . would soon expel / Her mischief, and purge off the baser fire / Victorious' (2.139-43).

'Purged and refined' ought to mean something different before the Fall. Raphael uses both words to describe the climbing process available to creatures in Eden. Here, what is *not* 'more refined, more spirituous and pure' cannot actually be soiled without indicting the goodness of creation. The spots on the moon, 'unpurged / Vapours not yet into her substance turned' (5.419-20), must not imply imperfection. Chapter 1 of this study looked at the moment of creation, when, Raphael tells Adam, the 'vital warmth' of the Holy Spirit 'downward purged / The black tartareous cold infernal dregs / Adverse to life' (7.237-39). Many critics have observed that this act is like digestion. The Spirit of God broods over the uncreated abyss, joining together like elements, separating unlike ones. Raphael puts the task before Adam and Eve in similar terms. They may ascend to Heaven, he says, by metabolizing their own bodies, digesting their lower forms into spirit. The process is similar to the conversion of foodstuffs into 'proper substance' (5.492) at lunchtime, when the baser elements of the meal are transformed into the higher matter of the human body. The faculties of sense

hear, see, smell, touch, taste,

Tasting concoct, digest, assimilate.
And corporeal to incorporeal turn. (5.411-13)

Adam and Eve, if they had not sinned, might have elevated their own bodies by the same procedure. They might have learned to 'winged ascend / Ethereal' (5.498-99).

What is most alarming about the black dregs at creation is that the Spirit sends them *downward*. The implication is that some matter *ex Deo* cannot be warmed by God's breath and must, as a result, be separated from the world of life, vomited into the dark depths of the universe. We saw in Chapter 1 that Milton's description gives rise, in a single stroke, to two monstrous theological difficulties. How is a perfect, omnibenevolent God capable of emanating such diseased matter from Himself? And why would He do so if only to throw it away? The digestion possible in the garden avoids the first problem since it always tends *upward*. The 'unpurged / Vapours' on the face of the moon, for example, are not meant to be flushed back to the earth: they have simply not been 'into [the moon's] substance turn'd.' 'Purged' seems rather, in Eden, to describe the kind of elevating incorporation that benefits the food consumed by Adam and Eve for dinner.

Before the Fall, 'refine' works in the same way. Raphael uses the word almost as Henry Vaughan does, when he describes the reunion of flesh and spirit. For Vaughan, 'refine' does not imply the removal of the undesired body, as it does for Spenser. Instead, the word describes the transmutation of earthly material.³⁷ Vaughan imagines a conversion in which the whole world participates. 'Water' is 'refin'd to

³⁷ In 'Resurrection and Immortality,' Vaughan writes that the body

like some spruce Bride
Shall one day rise, and clothed with shining light
All pure and bright
Remarry to the soul, for 'tis most plain
Thou only fall'st to be refin'd again. (47-50)

'Resurrection and Immortality' appears in *Silex Scintillans* (1650). I refer everywhere to *The Works of Henry Vaughan*, ed. L.C. Martin (second ed., Oxford, 1957).

motion,' he writes in 'The Tempest,' 'air to light.'³⁸ The digestive ascent that Milton imagines for Eden resembles this process. The body, 'improv'd by tract of time' (5.497), is absorbed into the higher substance of the spirit.

It does not escape Milton's attention in *De Doctrina* that man's original makeup resembles his Creator's. To the human amalgam — *totus homo*, 'the whole man,' *ex corpore, spiritu et anima* (Col. 15.218) — he compares the composition of a God who is capable of creation *ex Deo*:

Spiritus enim, ut substantia excellentior, substantiam utique inferiorem virtualiter, quod aiunt, et eminenter in se continet; ut facultas facultatem spiritualis, et rationalis corpoream, sentientem nempe et vegetativam. (Col. 15.24)

Moreover [God's] spirit, being the more excellent substance, virtually, as they say, and eminently contains within itself what is clearly the inferior substance; in the same way as the spiritual and rational faculty contains the corporeal, that is, the sentient and vegetative faculty. (CPW 6.309)

Placed beneath Heaven with what Rilke called a 're-creating spirit,'³⁹ Adam and Eve are to elevate what is lower, to refine themselves. Before them is a labour that, like the work in the garden, aims at the completion of creation. 'Thou also mad'st the night . . . thou the day,' they sing in Book 4, 'which we in our appointed work employed / Have finished happy' (724-27). If, as I have argued, success in that rural effort is impossible, notice what would happen if Adam and Eve were to conclude their inner project. They would reverse creation; they would return the divine *excessus*. The result is a problem that belongs neither to Plato nor to Augustine. Why, for what cause, did a perfect, infinite Being bother with a world that He designed to purge itself — to come back to Him?

The difficulty becomes clearer when we consult the tradition of openings to which 'what cause,' in Book 7, refers. The phrase has its roots in Virgil, who asks of Juno's anger at the start of the *Aeneid*: *Musa, mihi causas memora*, 'Muse, recall the causes,' the injury to her will, what she suffered. The more pressing allusion is to the

³⁸ 'The Tempest,' l. 31. Robert Ellrodt describes Vaughan's interest as 'bringing matter close to immateriality,' in *Seven Metaphysical Poets* (Oxford, 2000), 233.

³⁹ 'Jener entwerfende Geist,' in the *Sonnets to Orpheus*, Pt. 2, No. 12.

beginning of Milton's epic:

Say first, for heaven hides nothing from thy view
Nor the deep tract of hell, say first what cause
Moved our grand parents in that happy state
Favoured of heaven so highly, to fall off
From their creator, and transgress his will
For one restraint, lords of the world besides? (1.27-32)

There is no answer in the proem. The poet turns from the cause of sin to its vehicle, 'the infernal serpent,' and we step into Hell and revolt. The search elsewhere in *Paradise Lost* for an explanation for sin has produced a number of theories. Why do Adam and Eve violate God's sole command? For C.S. Lewis, the answer is pride — 'being too big for your boots, forgetting your place, thinking that you are God.'⁴⁰ E.M.W. Tillyard has more sympathy for the frailty of the human pair. He blames Eve for her ignorance, her 'mental triviality.' Adam, on the other hand, sins because he is too weak to live alone. He 'does not for a moment hesitate to sacrifice the course of action he knows to be right to his gregariousness.'⁴¹ A.J.A. Waldock quarrels with this description of Adam's impulse. He says that the Fall is the result of love, 'love as human beings know it best.'⁴² Paul Turner objects that this type of love is a form of idolatry. Adam falls 'so far into love as to renounce his own independent judgement and insight.'⁴³ Milton covers most of these possibilities when he describes the Fall in *De Doctrina*:

Anyone who examines this sin carefully will admit, and rightly, that it was a most atrocious offence, and that it broke every part of the law. For what fault is there which man did not commit in committing this sin? He was to be condemned both for trusting Satan and for not trusting God; he was faithless, ungrateful, disobedient, greedy, uxorious; she, negligent of her husband's welfare; both of them committed theft, robbery with violence, murder against their children (i.e., the whole human race); each was sacrilegious and deceitful, cunningly aspiring to divinity, although thoroughly unworthy of it, proud and arrogant. (CPW 6.383-84)

For Addison, the 'infinity of under morals' in *Paradise Lost* made it 'more useful and

⁴⁰ Lewis, *A Preface to 'Paradise Lost'* (1942), 69.

⁴¹ Tillyard, *Milton* (1930), 262.

⁴² A.J.A. Waldock, *'Paradise Lost' and Its Critics* (Cambridge, 1947), 51-52.

⁴³ Paul Turner, 'Woman and the Fall of Man,' *ES* 29 (1948), 8-9.

instructive than any other poem in any language.’ He found, nevertheless, that he was able to summarize its lesson simply. Sin is disobedience; ‘obedience to the will of God makes men happy, and . . . disobedience makes them miserable.’⁴⁴

Stanley Fish reduces Addison’s conclusion even further. The ‘under morals’ become different descriptions of the same phenomenon. Everything is disobedience: ‘what disobedience involves (presumption, ingratitude), what Adam and Eve commit themselves to by disobeying (lust, anxiety), which parts of their personalities are dominant when disobedience occurs (the affections).’⁴⁵ The answer to ‘what cause / Moved our grand parents’ becomes pleasingly circular. Adam and Eve disobeyed because they were disobedient.⁴⁶ The reader learns as much about sin from this reply as Lepidus does from Antony about crocodiles in *Antony and Cleopatra*:

Lepidus: What manner o’ thing is your crocodile?

Antony: It is shaped, sir, like itself; and it is as broad as it hath breadth: it is just so high as it is, and moves with its own organs: it lives by that which nourisheth it; and the elements once out of it, it transmigrates.

Lep. What colour is it of?

Ant. Of its own colour too.

Lep. ’Tis a strange serpent.

Ant. ’Tis so. And the tears of it are wet. (2.7.48-54)

For Fish, the tautology is the whole point. ‘It is no explanation, and because no one could take it for one, it has the advantage of preserving the autonomy of the Fall as an expression of free will . . . The reader who finds a cause for the Fall denies it by denying its freedom, and succumbs to still another form of Milton’s “good temptation.”’ Any sensible account of sin is an *ignis fatuus* that leads readers to justify the violation of an unreasonable command. The event, instead, should shimmer with mystery. ‘If we read

⁴⁴ Addison, *Spectator* 369, 3 May 1712, in the *Works*, ed. Hurd, rev. Bohn (1889-93), Vol. 3, 282.

⁴⁵ Fish, *Surprised by Sin* (1997), 259.

⁴⁶ Or, similarly: Eve did not abstain from eating because she was inabstinent. See *PL* 11.476, where Milton coins the word ‘inabstinence’ to describe her mistake. So far as I know, Millicent Bell was the first critic to state the poem’s description of sin in these terms. In ‘The Fallacy of the Fall in *Paradise Lost*,’ *PMLA* 68 (1953), 864, she writes that this ‘is no explanation,’ and argues that *Paradise Lost* moves forward the bordering line between innocence and corruption, so that the Fall has occurred well before the moment of eating. As evidence, Bell cites a series of prelapsarian surrenders: the dream, Adam’s passion for Eve, the charge of distrust in Book 9. This appraisal of the theology leads her to emphasize the elements of the poem that suggest a *felix culpa*, to which I turn in a moment.

properly and refuse to rest in superficial resemblances,' Fish writes, 'the Fall is continually thrown into brilliant relief as an incomprehensible phenomenon; otherwise we comprehend it, and by comprehending, deny it.'⁴⁷

This analysis makes the 'what cause' at the opening of *Paradise Lost* as vexing as the 'what cause' at its centre. In the first instance, Milton's answer is deliberately trivial. In the second, he replies inconsistently, with a series of contradictory claims. Light does break through, weakly, in Book 12. At the end of the exchange between Adam and Michael, the two questions of cause come together. The archangel shows Adam to the limit of the world and finishes his tale with a vision of Judgment. In the hereafter, he says, earth and Heaven become equal in bliss. Yet the return of a fallen creation to its source is not the same as the reincorporation described by Raphael in Book 5. The process is messier and much more difficult. At the reunion of creation with Creator, Michael tells Adam, the refuse of a 'perverted world' must be cast out. At the last, a waste of false temples, specious religions, apostates, wolves, must drop away. There is a pause in the archangel's speech that resembles 'the world's great period.' Then Adam utters his famous lines:

Oh goodness infinite, goodness immense!
That all this good of evil shall produce,
And evil turn to good; more wonderful
Than that which by creation first brought forth
Light out of darkness! Full of doubt I stand,
Whether I should repent me now of sin
By me done and occasioned, or rejoice
Much more, that much more good thereof shall spring,
To God more glory, more good will to men
From God, and over wrath grace shall abound. (12.469-78)

⁴⁷ Fish, *Surprised by Sin* (1997), 259, 231. A.D. Nuttall persuasively criticizes this position. An account of disobedience that places fault in free will, he suggests, runs afoul of the foreknowledge argument which Milton articulates elsewhere. See Nuttall, *Overheard by God* (London, 1980), 104-5: 'God's foreknowledge of an event certainly *entails* the occurrence of that event but it does not force it to happen . . . This Milton gratefully adopted ("If I foreknew, foreknowledge had no influence on their fault", III, 116-17). But we should notice the effect it has on the allied thesis: 'Adam fell because he was free.' . . . At once we find ourselves wanting to say, "Freedom *entails* the possibility of Adam's fall, but it in no way *causes* him to fall." In other words, we can only pretend that Adam's freedom *explains* his fall as long as we conflate the notions of entailment and causation . . . If we insist, against Boethius, that entailment is a sort of cause, we are forthwith forced to admit that, in so far as God foreknew Adam's sin, he caused it, and is therefore the author of evil.'

Adam, plainly, is describing the Fall as a *felix culpa*.⁴⁸ He suggests that sin has improved on God's goodness. An innocent creation would have returned to God by its own efforts — 'by degrees of merit raised,' God says, and 'under long obedience tried' (7.157-59). The Paradise that Michael and Adam describe is preferable because it contains creatures who are meritless and have panted for their happy seat. The sufferings of Christ make up for their deficiency. The eventual outcome is 'a paradise within thee, happier far' (12.587). It is 'more wonderful,' Adam says, 'than that which by creation first brought forth / Light out of darkness' (12.471-73). At this moment, he links the end of sin to the wider view of creation of which Michael has spoken. The answers to 'what cause / Moved the creator,' in Book 7, and 'what cause / Moved our grand parents,' in Book 1, converge. Adam replies: all this must happen so that God can embrace imperfect beings with His mercy.

This position is attended by theological difficulties too familiar to state here. One of its advantages usually goes unnoticed. Chapter 1 of this study also wondered about the relationship between creation and Judgment. Is 'light out of darkness' — creation out of chaos — a form of good out of evil? A refusal to find chaos malevolent, I argued, produces the unpalatable view that it is worthless, of no use at all. The options now before us are much the same. Suppose we discard the *felix culpa*. Milton, in the grayness of a 'faith unanimous though sad' (12.603), surely leaves us grounds to do so. We must then ask what purpose creation would have served if man had not fallen. The goodness breathed into the world would have returned to God. It would have returned with *merit*, we may say. This observation merely shifts attention one step backward: from the world to Christ, from 'the second kind of external efficiency' to the first. What is the reason for *His* creation? Unless He offers to die, willingly undergoes humiliation, and is 'found / By merit more than birthright Son of God' (3.308-9), the Son's existence is just as baffling.

⁴⁸ The classic argument appears in Arthur Lovejoy, 'Milton and the Paradox of the Fortunate Fall,' *ELH* 4 (1937), 161-79.

The last words between man and angel in Book 12 have the same tone as the end of Ecclesiastes. In that book, after the reader has pushed through dense entanglings of aphorism and despair, there is at last the promise of a clearing. The Preacher sounds a cry to enjoy the world before the clouds of age descend, before the daughters of song grow soft and ‘those that look out of the windows be darkened’ (Ecclesiastes 12:3). Time steals away vision, and one must try to *see* before twilight overtakes the eyelids. Then, nearly finished, *v’yoter*, ‘a remaining word’:

Let us hear the conclusion of the matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments:
for this is the whole duty of man. / For God shall bring every work into
judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.
(Ecclesiastes 12:13-14)

The verses are unsatisfying. The final lesson does not follow; we feel that the Preacher has fallen back on the party line. Where is the voice that complained of the same fate in store for all — ‘one event to the righteous, and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean’ (9:2)? What one wants is a blow to the head, or the fire of Blake. ‘Solomon says “Vanity of Vanities all is Vanity” & what can be Foolisher than this?’⁴⁹ Scholars established long ago that this section of the book is the work of a redactor.⁵⁰ Adam unwittingly references Ecclesiastes 12:13 in Book 7 of *Paradise Lost*, when he puts his question before Raphael:

his admonishment
Receive with solemn purpose to observe
Immutably his sovereign will, the end
Of what we are. (77-80)

The close of the poem brings the similar announcement that ‘to obey is best, / And love with fear the only God . . . on him sole depend’ (12.561-64). For Michael, this is ‘the sum / Of wisdom’ (12.575-76). The recognition of ‘more wonderful’ fades, and there is the sense of a door closing.

⁴⁹ See the inscription to his engraving of Mirth and Her Companions, an illustration for Milton’s ‘L’ Allegro.’ In *The Complete Poetry and Prose*, ed. David V. Erdman (rev. ed., New York, 1988), 682.

⁵⁰ An overview appears in John Barton, *Reading the Old Testament* (rev. ed., Louisville, 1996), 61-76. Barton reads the closing verses differently. He finds them ‘a fitting climax’; prepared by scepticism, we now ‘take seriously the fact that God alone is the really worthwhile end of human life, and all merely human pursuits are ultimately unsatisfying’ (70).

When Milton addresses questions of timing in *De Doctrina*, the world becomes very small. It seems impossible that God could have spent much effort ‘decreeing things which it was to take him only six days to create: things which were to be governed in various ways for a few thousand years, and then finally either received into an unchanging state with God for ever, or else for ever thrown away’ (CPW 6.299). Late in *Paradise Lost*, Adam is able to take a similar stance towards creation. Before, he would have stopped the sun to know the causes of the world; now he sees that the race of time will draw to a close. ‘Beyond is all abyss,’ he says, ‘eternity, whose end no eye can reach’ (12.554-56). The recognition of earthly limits is followed by a moment of self-awareness. Adam announces that he has had his ‘fill / Of knowledge, what this vessel can contain’ (12.558-59). The flash of understanding grows fainter. A grand claim, ‘all this good of evil shall produce,’ is replaced by a smaller one. For now, ‘with good / Still overcoming evil’ (12.565-66), God works.⁵¹

Adam, full of the measure of the world, brims over for only a moment with the knowledge of redemption. He glimpses God’s aims and then these thoughts fall away. His example is typical of the poem. Marvell writes in his dedication to *Paradise Lost* of the ‘vast design’ of Milton’s ‘slender book’: ‘Messiah crowned, God’s reconciled decree / Rebelling angels, the forbidden tree, / Heaven, hell, earth, chaos, all’ (2-5). The younger man famously admits that he feared disaster. He worried about sacred truths coarsened by the fancy of song, about subjects and perplexities too large for a poet to span. Finishing the work, Marvell asks for Milton’s pardon:

But I am now convinced, and none will dare
Within thy labours to pretend a share.
Thou hast not missed one thought that could be fit,

⁵¹ The shift from a view of final action to one that involves a long sequence of moments is available in one of the most beautiful passages in ‘Lycidas’:

There entertain him all the Saints above,
In solemn troops, and sweet Societies
That sing, and singing in their glory move,
And wipe the tears for ever from his eyes. (178-81)

The last line is poised between two possibilities: an end to weeping, and an endless wiping away of tears.

And all that was improper dost omit:
 So that no room is here for writers left
 But to detect their ignorance, or theft. (25-30)

Marvell, poet of restriction,⁵² turns *Paradise Lost* into one of the containers of which he is so fond. The epic does not quite match his description. It is true that *Paradise Lost* is crowded with schemes of cosmos and time. But Milton, far more than Marvell, is aware that such a vast packing is not possible without superfluity. The task requires what one eighteenth-century critic, writing of Milton, called a 'redundancy of imagination.'⁵³ *Paradise Lost* swells as it joins the great excesses of creation and redemption. If the poem overflows, matters are soon set aright. An hour precise exacts our parting.

⁵² John Carey, 'Reversals Transposed,' in *Approaches to Marvell*, ed. C.A. Patrides (London, 1978), 140-42, lists tortoise shells, enclosed gardens, islands, buildings, 'iron gates' of life, and 'curled trammels' of hair in 'Upon Appleton House' alone.

⁵³ See *The Memoirs of Thomas Hollis*, ed. Francis Blackburne (London, 1680), Vol. 1, 145.

The oddest thing he said was that he had been commanded to do certain things — that is, to write about Milton — and that he was applauded for refusing. He struggled with the Angels and was victor.

—Henry Crabb Robinson, on William Blake, in his diary, 6 January 1826

Bibliography

The following abbreviations are used below:

ES	<i>English Studies</i>
JEGP	<i>Journal of English and Germanic Philology</i>
JHI	<i>Journal of the History of Ideas</i>
MQ	<i>Milton Quarterly</i>
MS	<i>Milton Studies</i>
NQ	<i>Notes and Queries</i>
PMLA	<i>Publications of the Modern Language Association</i>
RES	<i>Review of English Studies</i>
SEL	<i>Studies in English Literature</i>
SP	<i>Studies in Philology</i>
TSSL	<i>Texas Studies in Language and Literature</i>

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