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The Rhetoric of Feminine Priority and the Ethics of Form in Paradise Lost

> To whom thus *Eve* with perfect beauty adorn'd.
>   My Author and Disposer, what thou bidd'st
>   Unargu'd I obey; so God ordains,
>   God is thy Law, thou mine: to know no more
> Is woman's happiest knowledge and her praise[1]

I have been thinking lately about something I will call textual ethics. In particular, I have in mind two distinct but related aspects of textual agency. On the side of reading, I am concerned with the well-worn thought that reading may be a transforming experience, constituted as, and resulting in, an ethical choice. On the side of writing, one might see an ethical moment in the willingness of an author to submit himself or herself to the logic of his or her text, following its tropes and schemes to places at first unanticipated by authorial intention. Taken together these processes make up two sides of the same ethical coin. The features that lend to a text whatever transforming power it may have emerge in the writer's more or less intrepid collaboration with his or her medium and material and the reader's willingness to engage in a similar collaboration with the resulting text. One way to think about the sort of textual agency I am trying to understand is to consider the writer as the first reader, transformed by the text in the encounter as its author. In the process of writing the writer is thus transformed into the author of the text he or

1. *Paradise Lost* (IV, 634–35). Citations of Milton's poetry are from *John Milton: Complete Poetry and Major Prose*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (New York, 1957).

she has written. The variable historical efficacy of the text—when it is written and when it is read—must somehow inhere in its formal features.

For example, the author of *Eikonoklastes* and *Primo Defensio* emerges unequivocally as a regicide—much less ambiguously so than the author who began those works. The publication of these texts would turn out to be a decisive public moment for Milton, earning him some time in hiding and a brief incarceration at the Restoration.[2] It may or may not also have been a decisive private moment; but for the sake of illustration, it is not difficult to imagine the author of these texts, following not only his arguments, but his persuasive rhetoric—the internal logic of his tropes and schemes—transforming into the confirmed regicide in the course of the writing. In writing his name on these works, which were undertaken not on his own initiative but on behalf of the government that employed him, Milton identified publicly and, quite likely, privately, with the writer who said these things.[3] If this is so, the challenge, for us as ethical critics and literary historians, is to identify and describe the formal features through which the transforming effects are mediated. One seventeenth-century discourse describing such features is the art of rhetoric.

Rhetorical self-delineation is frequently represented in Milton's texts. When, for example, in *Paradise Lost* IV, Eve calls Adam her "author and disposer," she casts their relationship in the language of rhetoric. Authoring corresponds to the rhetorical first-step of invention. Adam is her inventor because he discovered her, or more precisely, found her—by supplementing a gap in the Symbolic of Eden. Having observed the mating of the animals, Adam conceives the species female, but finds no corresponding referent in the genus man. Because Adam's intellect is

2. A month by month summary of events befalling Milton at the Restoration may be found in Gordon Campbell, *A Milton Chronology* (London, 1997), pp. 190–94. For narrative accounts, see William Riley Parker, *Milton: A Biography*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968), I, 567–87 and Barbara K. Lewalski, *The Life of John Milton*. Blackwell Critical Biographies (Oxford, 2000), pp. 399–404. Milton remained in hiding from early May, 1660 until the King's assent to the Act of Oblivion on August 29. Although Milton's situation at the Restoration is difficult to establish with precision, it is clear that he was not alone in thinking it precarious. On June 16, an order for his arrest was issued and his books were removed from the Bodleian Library in Oxford. On August 29, Milton's books were publicly burned by the hangman at the Old Bailey in London. In October he was arrested and briefly incarcerated.

3. Milton was the object of continual invective by Royalist writers, who attributed his blindness to divine retribution for his anti-monarchial tracts. John Heydon, e.g., achieves a notable historical specificity by reporting that Milton was struck blind by God as he wrote the second word of *Eikonoklastes* (*The Idea of Law Charactered* [June, 1660], in Campbell, p. 191).

discursive and not merely empirical, the non-existent female man registers as a lack, a conceptual category left materially empty—a hole in creation. I use the term symbolic in the Lacanian sense, indicating a syntax or grammar that structures the self in relation to its signifiers. The subject of the symbolic identifies itself as a discursive sign. Plainly put, this subject enters the Symbolic by answering to the name it is assigned therein. For Lacan, this identification of self and signifier is the second step (or cut) in the formation of the ego. It is preceded by the subject's pre-verbal identification with a bodily image. The Imaginary subject recognizes itself as an integral and embodied whole by analogy with others. The infant derives his or her body image from the bodies it sees, including that of its own reflection in the mirror. Observing the coming and going of (for example) its mother, the baby comes to distinguish the integral human body from its parts—to take possession of its own hands and feet and infer that it has a face.

Thus, Imaginary and Symbolic refer to epistemological modalities associated respectively with visual analogy and linguistic signification. Each represents a different mediation of the Real, which, like Milton's "Chaos," is whatever is prior to or in excess of the organizing categories of cognition. Neither symbolic nor imaginary, the Real resists signification and is thus foreclosed from discourse.[4] Because cognition is conditioned by representability—by our ability to render a (presumably) material event as a mental event—the Real is always and only encountered retrospectively. It is what we surmise, on the basis of Imaginary and Symbolic mediations, to underlie and exceed the world(s) of which we are aware. "If a tree falls in the forest and there is no one to hear it, does it make a sound?" Does the event subsist in itself or in the subject by whom it is experienced? We can say that something happens, things (the tree, the

4. Because Lacan develops and reworks the three registers over time and in varied contexts in his work, the subject does not lend itself to concise reference, but see esp., "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Pyschoanalytic Experience"; "The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis," in Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, tr. Alan Sheridan (New York, 1978), pp. 1–7; 30–113; and *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book II, The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954–1955*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Sylvana Tomaselli (New York, 1991), esp. pp. 175–273. For a useful explanatory note, see "Imaginary, Symbolic, Real," in Alan Sheridan's alphabetical glossary, "Translator's Note," in Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, tr. Alan Sheridan (New York, 1978), pp. 279–80. See also the entries "Imaginary" and "Symbolic," in J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, tr. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York, 1973).

ground, the surrounding air) are altered. But the relational categories that render something as a tree, as falling, as vibration and as the subject who experiences the vibration as sound, inhere neither in the material events nor in the subject who experiences them. A *tree falling* in a *forest* and being *heard* or *unheard* by a *person* implies a comprehensive configuration of all these categories (subject, material, action) in a complex system of representations. Only then may we hear it and posit our experience as the effect of *something* that happened, as perhaps the sound made by a tree falling in a forest—or, alternatively, as something that did not happen, as perhaps a tree falling in the forest and making no sound. Because the putatively prior event is deduced from its representations, the historical event—in this instance the falling of the tree—is always dependent on a formal one. I am tempted to go one step further and identify this formal event as a narrative. Narrative might then be thought of as the rhetoric of subjective configuration. Telling stories in which we represent ourselves mandates and implements one or another selection and configuration of elements in a conceptual universe.[5] Because narrative submits the present of speaking to the expectations of a represented speaker, it also installs a peculiar temporality in the subject, who comes to locate himself or herself at the constantly moving intersection of anticipation and retrospection. Because anticipated consequences are multiple, present action may be chosen so as to favor one anticipated outcome over another. I will argue, at the end of this essay, that such successive moments of choice define also the field of a rhetorical ethics.

II

The classic psychoanalytic transcription of the subject's temporal predicament is found in Freud's case history of the "Wolfman."[6] Freud's patient reports a disturbing dream that first occurred when he was about three years old. In the course of the analysis Freud comes to understand this dream as a (distorted and censored) representation of something that the Wolfman either witnessed or fantasized when he was eighteen months

5. I elaborate and argue this point in considerable detail in *The Story of All Things: Writing the Self in English Renaissance Narrative Poetry* (Durham, N. C., 1998), see esp. pp. 34–55.
6. From *The History of an Infantile Neurosis*, in *The Standard Edition of the Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, tr. James and Alix Strachey, 24 vols. (London, 1953–74), XVII, 37–38. Subsequent citations of the *Standard Edition* will be abbreviated SE.

old.[7] The point of Freud's construction is that the memory of the traumatic scene remained latent between the time when his patient witnessed (or imagined) the primal scene and the first occurrence of the traumatic dream. The experience of the trauma was thus deferred (*nachträglich*) until the child had acquired a symbolic system with which to represent it. Once the deferred trauma is experienced as part of a complex of associations, it may be projected back to an "originary" event (the Wolfman's witnessing of the primal scene). Other experiences that may have occurred during the period of time between the trauma and its representation are then reconceived as the consequences of this belatedly experienced "event." The "primal scene" is only and traumatically experienced when it becomes part of a story, in effect, part of a case history. Rhetoricians might call the temporal reversal of this metonymy of the cause for the effect metalepsis. The cause enters the case history only after and through the analysis of its effects.

Lacan ascribes such structural belatedness ultimately to the constraints of language. When we say "I" and identify ourselves as both the speaker of a sentence and the subject bespoken in it, we fall into an irreducible temporal gap. This is the context for Lacan's celebrated passage about discovering oneself in what one will have become, in and through a symbolic order that is always experienced retrospectively: "For the function of language is not to inform but to evoke. . . . I identify myself in language, but only by losing myself in it like an object. What is realized in my history is not the past definite of what was, since it is no more, or even the present perfect of what has been in what I am, but the future anterior of what I shall have been for what I am in the process of becoming."[8]

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7. The question of whether the child saw or imagined he saw the copulation "a tergo" of his parents lies at the center of the recently revived controversy about Freud's abandonment of the "seduction theory." Freud had initially posited a premature sexual experience (in today's parlance, abuse) as a necessary element in the etiology of neurosis. But by the time of the Wolfman case history, he had determined that the distinction between a phantasized and "actual" event was irrelevant. The motives for this revision have been questioned, but in the context of the Wolfman's analysis , the case is clearly made that any actually occurring event would have become traumatic only as a formal event. The trauma is not in what was seen, but in the transforming effect of the vision on the Symbolic organization of the subject. Thus Freud finally abandons the seduction theory on formal grounds: historical occurrences remain latent until they become formal events.

8. Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, tr. Sheridan, p. 86. See also, Émile Benveniste, "Subjectivity in Language," in *Problems in General Linguistics*, tr. Mary Elizabeth Meek (Coral Gables, Fla., 1971), pp. 222–30.

Lacan also maps the structural belatedness of the subject onto Freud's story of the development of the ego out of the Oedipal conflict.[9] Freud posits that the infant (boy) is prodded to recognize the delimitation between self and world, first by the periodic withdrawal of the mother (here understood as the nurse, the nurturing caregiver), which brings the child to realize that he is possessed of a unified and integral body. This first differentiation of "my body" from the parental body corresponds to Lacan's "Mirror Stage" in which the infant learns that he or she is identified with a body, that he or she is an integral whole made up of parts (*A Selection*, pp. 1–7). For Lacan, the mirror stage is the entry into the Imaginary: "This jubilant assumption of his specular image by the child at the *infans* stage, still sunk in his motor incapacity and nursling dependence, would seem to exhibit in an exemplary situation the symbolic matrix in which the *I* is precipitated in a primordial form, before it is objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other, and before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as a subject" (*A Selection*, p. 2).

In the Freudian Oedipus, the intervention of the father (here understood as the person who lays claim to the mother's desire) and its attendant castration anxiety induces the renunciation of possessive desire for one parent and identification with the desire of the other. In Lacan's version the identification with the father is a linguistic one. The "I-thou" dialogue of mother and child is disrupted by the entry of a third person, and the child enters the Symbolic, shifting from a visual identification to identification with the *name* of the father. It must be emphasized here that Lacan's "name(s) of the Father" refer not to the "real" father but to the Symbolic father, the law of Language. To enter the Symbolic is to answer to a name and thus to accept the objectification of one's self in language. In patrilineal societies such as Milton's the name to which we answer is the name of our father; to accept it is not only to enter language but to enter the social web at a pre-ordained place.[10]

9. Freud's most concise account of the emergence of the ego out of the destruction of the Oedipal conflict is perhaps *The Ego and the Id*, SE XIX, pp. 3–66.

10. By his own admission, Freud's Oedipal etiology of the ego is heavily weighted toward a description of "the boy." Sporadic attempts are made—usually in the form of comments on the work of others—to accommodate "the girl" as well, but for Freud, the masculine etiology remains normative. Lacan's recasting of the Oedipus in structural linguistic terms reduces but does not eliminate the problem of Freudian phallocentricity. But see Jacqueline Rose, "Introduction II," in Jacques Lacan and the École Freudienne, *Feminine Sexuality*, ed. Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose, tr. Jacqueline Rose (New York, 1985), pp. 27–57, for a sympathetic appraisal. The present argument explores the resistance of the feminine operating within Milton's appropriation of an overtly masculinist tradition of scriptural interpretation; a similar resistance could be presumed to

To return from this psychoanalytic exposition to the subject at hand, it is only necessary to notice that Lacan's registers, like Freud's *Nachträgli-chkeit*, are formally rhetorical categories. The Imaginary, with its depend-ence on resemblance, corresponds to metaphor. The privilege extended by the Imaginary to visual knowledge reflects the fact that metaphoric associations are made at the level of the signified. The metonymic defiles of the Symbolic, by contrast, follow affinities between contiguous sig-nifiers, coming, one after another, as it were, to our ears. The transition from Imaginary to Symbolic corresponds to the transition from descrip-tion to narrative. As description is not lost in narrative but preserved in a temporally dynamic form, the Imaginary persists in the Symbolic as a set of historically determined analogical associations which may now be made on the level of the signified: "My love is a red, red rose"—I may call my love by the name of this other thing because of the pertinent attributes s/he shares with it. The deferred action of latent trauma corresponds to the temporality of narrative, in which the unfolding events acquire stable meaning only at the story's end.[11]

<center>III</center>

Recounting the creation of Eve to Raphael, Adam tells how, having just named the animals and with "sudden apprehension" "understood / Thir Nature," he came upon (in-venire—"to come or light upon a thing, to find, to meet with"[12]) Eve's empty place; that is, her absence from the category where she should have been and would come to be: "I found not what methought I wanted still" (VIII, 355). Consider the resonance of "methought" and "I wanted still" in this sentence. Eve is first of all something missing, but her absence is made good in thought. She is what Adam thought he wanted, and when she is created, she will be his thought made flesh. She is what Adam "wanted" or lacked, but also what he desired and what he thought he desired.

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be at work within the Freudian Oedipus. Moreover the close fit between the "Our Father" of Christianity and the Father of the Symbolic Law in Lacan's etiology of the speaking subject was not lost on Lacan, who notes it often, thus further historicizing both the Christian and the Freud-ian rhetorics. Recent work by Slavoj Žižek has begun to explore Lacan's more-or-less self-conscious Christianization of the "Jewish Science." See *The Fragile Absolute or why the Christian Legacy is Worth Fighting For* (London and New York, 2000).

11. For a detailed study of the temporal implications of narrative, see *The Story of All Things*, esp. pp. 5–34.

12. S. V. invenio, Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short, *A New Latin Dictionary* (New York, 1907).

In Book VIII, when God asks Adam if the Garden is complete and satisfactory, Adam is moved to ask his inventor to redress his perceived lack of a mate. Adam diplomatically displaces the lack in creation to a failure of his own vision, his own invention. God has "provided all things," but there is this one thing that Adam cannot come upon:

> Author of this Universe,
> And all this good to man, for whose well being
> So amply, and with hands so liberal
> Thou hast provided all things: but with mee
> I see not who partakes. (VIII, 360–64)

Rhetorically speaking, then, Eve, and with her the notion of female human being, enters Milton's creation (and God's creation) as a periphrasis for something left unnamed and apparently missing within the category of sexed creatures. It is as though she cannot be found because Adam cannot find anything to name in her place. Adam's underlying logic is that of a metonymy of the genus for the species: all creatures appear with mates; my mate does not appear; I must speak to God about this defect of being in the genus "partaker." The lack of the species (from Latin, *species*, or appearance, "That which is seen in a thing"[13]) is inscribed in the mental category Adam extrapolates by observing the creatures. The genus is in turn inscribed in language, where the missing "partaker," for which there is no corresponding thing, signifies the lack of a proper name. By withholding Eve, God insures that Adam first conceives her as absent, as what he wants. If Adam's periphrastic reference first apprehends Eve as an excess of signifier, a word—"partaker"—without a thing, conversely, in the same process of naming, he comes to recognize God as a surplus of being over signification: "O by what Name, for thou above all these, / Above mankind, or aught than mankind higher, / Surpassest far my naming" (VIII, 357–59). Adam gives his inability to name properly Eve and God inverse interpretations. She cannot be named (or seen) because she is not (yet) among the "all things" that God has provided. God, on the other hand, overwhelms and transcends Nature and so offers Adam no "sudden apprehension." Eve's (temporary) lack of being is symbolically determined but left empty; she enters Adam's conceptual universe (he conceives of her) because, in some sense, she is symbolically required. God too was initially conceived by Adam in this way, when Adam,

13. Lewis and Short, S. V. species, II.

seeing creation, began to search for a creator; but unlike Eve, who is signified only as an empty place in the category "mate," and whose necessary attributes Adam can discern by observing the animals, male and female, God is everywhere signified by all his creations—by a metonymy of the effect for the cause:

> Thou Sun, said I, fair Light,
> And thou enlight'n'd Earth, so fresh and gay,
> Ye Hills and Dales, ye Rivers, Woods, and Plains
> And ye that live and move, fair Creatures, tell,
> Tell, if ye saw, how came I thus, how here?
> Not of myself, by some great Maker then,
> In goodness and in power preëminent (VIII, 273–79)

When Adam sees the world, his language—comprising both a lexicon and a grammar—provides a noun, "creatures," that implies an action, "to create," and an agent "creator," which Adam understands as "Maker."

   We might further note that when Adam surveys the creatures and finds all but himself mated with a partaker, he displaces onto the lack of a female the salient fact that he also does not see himself. More precisely, he does not see himself as an integral whole, but rather as a collection of parts, "Myself I then perus'd, and Limb by Limb / Survey'd." (VIII, 267–68). It is especially worth noting that this reasonable method of self-discovery would deny Adam knowledge, not only of his backside and his inside, but also and especially of his face. In this respect he contrasts sharply with Eve, whose encounter with her reflection in the water elicits the call of *vox dei* in Book IV. Eve's reflection, we recall, is framed by the reflection of the sky:

> I first awak't, and found myself repos'd
> Under a shade on flow'rs, much wond'ring where
> And what I was, whence thither brought, and how.
> Not distant far from thence a murmuring sound
> Of waters issu'd from a Cave and spread
> Into a liquid Plain, then stood unmov'd
> Pure as th'expanse of Heav'n; I thither went
> With unexperience't thought, and laid me down
> On the green bank, to look into the clear
> Smooth Lake, that to me seem'd another Sky.
> As I bent down to look, just opposite,
> A Shape within the wat'ry gleam appear'd
> Bending to look on me (IV, 450–62)

In the lake, within what "seem'd another Sky," Eve sees what she will soon discover is herself, framed precisely in the hole revealed by Adam's direct inspection heavenward. At the risk of being tedious, a comparison of the accounts of self-discovery offered by first man and first woman is worthy of reiteration: Adam looks directly at the sky and then directly at himself, limb by limb. After summing his visible parts and cataloguing the other creatures, he reports with some trepidation the apparent absence of his "partaker." Eve, however, first sees herself reflected within a reflected world (which she somehow recognizes as *another* sky), and what she posits in this worldly space before the intercession of the voice is, indeed, her partaker:

> I started back,
> It started back, but pleas'd I soon return'd,
> Pleas'd it return'd as soon with answering looks
> Of sympathy and love. (IV, 462–65)

Without Eve, Adam knows himself only as a collection of parts. Without her and barring a visit to the lake with its attendant narcissistic undertones, he would have to derive his sense of bodily integrity from God, in whose image he was created.[14] But Adam deems such a direct identification with God too difficult, too distant: "To attain / The heighth and depth of thy Eternal ways / All human thoughts come short, Supreme of things" (VIII, 412–14), and God affirms this judgment: "Thus far to try thee, *Adam*, I was pleas'd, / And find thee knowing not of Beasts alone, / Which thou hast rightly nam'd, but of thyself" (VIII, 437–39). To meet God half-way, so to speak, Adam first needs the image of himself reflected back to him from his image Eve, as mankind will later need second Adam to close the gap between God and his mortal image. In this respect Eve will be Adam's "mother" just as Mary, second Eve, will be the mother of God.[15]

The reciprocal symmetry of Adam's creation story and Eve's is striking. As far as we are told, Eve's is the first human face Adam ever sees.

14. The commentary on Eve's putative narcissism is extensive. Most pertinent to the present argument is John Guillory's discussion of primary and secondary narcissism as an index of gender in *Paradise Lost*, "Milton, Narcissism, Gender: On the Geneology of Male Self-Esteem," in *Critical Essays on John Milton*, ed. Christopher Kendrick (New York, 1995), pp. 194–233.

15. See my "Servile / Sterile / Style: Milton and the Question of Woman," in *Milton and the Idea of Woman*, ed. Julia Walker (Urbana, 1988), pp. 148–68. See also Mieke Bal, *Lethal Love: Feminist Literary Readings of Biblical Love Stories* (Bloomington, 1987), pp. 104–30.

His experience of his own unseen features and the integrity of his bodily form are visually derived from her. Lacanians will of course recognize in this Adam's entry into the Imaginary via the mirror stage. Adam's development is compressed: when he calls the woman "Eve" he re-enters the Symbolic, in which a name is substituted for an image. When Adam asks God for a mate, he has discovered her as a symbolic absence defined by the grammar that allows him to name the animals. When she stands before him as the image of "His flesh, his bone" to whose being he "lent . . . Substantial Life" (IV, 483–85), the linguistic sign and the mental image are joined, but the sacrifice is characteristically literal. She is "his bleeding rib" and the "Substantial Life" she has is his. Adam's defect of vision ("but with mee I *see* not who partakes") calls for the supplement of Eve. Eve's corresponding misprision—mistaking her watery image for another like herself, a speaking subject—calls for the intervention of a *voice* to "warn" her that what she sees is but herself.

Only after he observes Eve's difference can Adam name himself as its other. Only after Eve accepts Adam's difference can she bring forth "Multitudes like thyself, and thence be call'd / Mother of human Race" (IV, 474–75). That Adam names the woman "of Man / Extracted" (VIII, 496–97) Eve (Hebrew: *heva*: life), moreover, institutes a complex rhetorical revision of his symbolic universe. Not merely a denotation, Eve's name is very much a motivated signifier. The concept woman begins as the particular elicited by an empty space in the genus "partaker"; to name the woman "life" is a deferred action that subsequently subsumes the genus within the particular. Eve's name is a synecdoche and an occasion to appreciate the efficiency of Adam's rhetorical onomastics. Extending to the woman a name already freighted with a conceptual association, Adam positions Eve as the belated origin of all vitality, the "mother of the universe" from which all life proceeds: "In solitude / What happiness, who can enjoy alone, / Or *all* enjoying, what contentment find?" (VIII, 364–66, emphasis mine). The impact of this naming is reinforced by its textual negative, the naming of Sin, from whose womb comes Death.

The coincident lack of self signified to Adam by the lack of a mate is yet another harmonic resonance of "I found not what methought I wanted still." The rhetoric of Book VIII reworks that of Book IV in the reverse direction. Seeking a metaphor, another like himself, Adam discovers a category (genus-homo) in which to discover his human nature. His rhetorical invention of Eve as that which is wanting reflects in inverse form what he will discover after she is created; for she is "what methought I

wanted still" and, when he has her, she will remain, above all else, "what [he] wants still." For he will still want her and still not have her. Her function with respect to Adam is to be like him but not him. Only through her form, presented with the spectacular litotes "Manlike, but different sex" (VIII, 471), can he conceptualize human being as a class and realize himself within it as a man, and to do that, he has lent his very particular flesh, bone, and life to another, from whom he expects multitudes. To serve this purpose, Eve, although she is given to Adam and although she is given the name of life itself, must also preserve the difference between her self and Adam by remaining her own. If she were simply man-like, as Sin is simply the material manifestation of Satan's thought (born from his head and with no bloody part—"Substantial Life"—taken), Adam's situation would resemble that of Eve at the lake. His image would be a reflection of himself, rather than a subject like himself.[16] Put another way: as a discursive subject Adam discovers himself in the difference between the speaking "I" and the "I" it speaks, and in the related difference between generic man and particular Adam. To be like enough to Adam, Eve must present him with her and his own self-difference.

IV

The pressure of the material substance of the signifier on the concept it signifies is made comically evident in *Paradise Lost* by a persistent excess of the literal in Adam's exchanges with God. When Adam asks for a partaker, he presumably does not anticipate that God will reach into his body and take a part, his "bleeding rib." Similarly, when he describes a mate as "what methought I wanted still," he probably does not grasp that when he has a mate, she will be what he still wants, that is, lacks and desires. She is at once the visible manifestation of his "vehement desire" and the alienation of his inmost part: his "bleeding rib" placed before him as another *like* himself. This literal insistence on the double sense that accrues

16. Freud makes a similar observation in "On Narcissism: An Introduction," SE XIV, 78: "The individual does actually carry on a twofold existence: one to serve his own purposes and the other as a link in a chain, which he serves against his will, or at least involuntarily. The individual himself regards sexuality as one of his own ends; whereas from another point of view he is an appendage to his germplasm, at whose disposal he puts his energies in return for a bonus of pleasure. He is the mortal vehicle of a possibly immortal substance—like the inheritor of an entailed property, who is only the temporary holder of an estate which survives him. The separation of the sexual instincts from the ego instincts would simply reflect this twofold function of the individual."

to "want" as a verbal residue persisting in the substantive form seems to surprise and unsettle Adam when he confides his passion to Raphael, who, I think, misses his point entirely. Explaining that he finds "In all things else delight indeed, but such / As used or not, works in the mind no change, / No vehement desire" (VIII, 524–26), Adam worries that his enjoyment of Eve is:

> Far otherwise, transported I behold,
> Transported touch; here passion first I felt,
> Commotion strange, in all enjoyments else
> Superior and unmov'd, here only weak
> Against the charm of Beauty's powerful glance.
> Or Nature fail'd in mee, and left some part
> Not proof enough such Object to sustain,
> Or from my side subducting, took perhaps
> More than enough (VIII, 529–37)

In what way, precisely, is Eve "more than enough"? To approach this question it may prove useful to examine further Eve's alliance with rhetoric. As rhetoric is the adornment of argument, Eve "with perfect beauty adorn'd" is the adornment of Adam's desire, its embodied form and the witness to its excess: "Too much of Ornament, in outward show / Elaborate, of inward less exact" (VIII, 538–39). In her, his want—his lacking and his desire—stands naked before him, his thought made flesh. Raphael's incomprehension may be understood in terms of Milton's two curious references to angelic sex. When Adam smartly responds to the angel's accusation of uxoriousness by inquiring about angelic love-making, Raphael assures him:

> Whatever pure thou in the body enjoy'st
> (And pure thou wert created) we enjoy
> In eminence, and obstacle find none
> Of membrane, joint, or limb, exclusive bars:
> Easier than Air with Air, if Spirits embrace,
> Total they mix, Union of Pure with Pure
> Desiring. (VIII, 622–28)

In Book I we are told that "Spirits when they please / Can either Sex assume, or both; so soft / And uncompounded is thir Essence pure" (423–25). Because the angels are androgynous and capable of total polymorphous interpenetration, they have no lack to redress and consequently no residual wanting. Unlike Adam and Eve, whose desire is necessarily a

desire for the other, the angels are able to join action and substance: "union of pure with pure desiring." If Adam and Eve's relations are conjugal, angelic relations might be called gerundive.[17] Adam's question goes to the heart of Raphael's authority in the passage about Eve. When it comes to the (again literal) impasse of human sexuality, the angel, understandably, does not know what he is talking about.

"In the image of God created he him; Male and Female created he them." What can this mean? In linking Adam's discovery of Eve to the discovery of want, Milton, consciously or not, represents a certain dissymmetry in the genders, a dissymmetry that recapitulates once again the curious relationship of grammar to rhetoric. This relation, which I would like now to use to describe the relation of Eve to Adam as well, may in fact be described with a phrase Milton used in *Of Education* to describe the relationship of poetry to logic and rhetoric in his proposed school curriculum: "subsequent, or indeed rather precedent":

> Logic therefore so much as is usefull, is to be referr'd to this due place withall her well couch't heads and Topics, untill it be time to open her contracted palm into a gracefull and ornate Rhetorick taught out of the rule of *Plato*, *Aristotle*, *Phalareus*, *Cicero*, *Hermongenes*, *Longinus*. To which Poetry would be made subsequent, or indeed rather precedent, as being lesse suttle and fine, but more simple, sensuous and passionate. I mean not here the prosody of a verse . . . but that sublime art which in *Aristotles poetics*, in *Horace*, and the *Italian* commentaries of *Castelvetro*, *Tasso*, *Mazzoni*, and others, teaches what the laws are of a true *Epic* poem, what of a *Dramatic*, what of a *Lyric*, what decorum is, which is the grand master peece to observe. This would . . . shew them, what Religious, what glorious and magnificent use might be made of Poetry both in divine and humane things.[18]

"My Author and Disposer": the author or inventor comes upon, finds, or discovers an argument. "Disposer" refers to the next step in the rhetorical process. Once the argument of an oration has been invented and exposed, which is to say once its wanting—what it desires and what it lacks—has been recognized, it must be analyzed and disposed into parts.

17. Compare Spenser's evocation of the Mount where Adonis "liveth in eternall blis, / Joying his goddesse, and of her enjoyed," *The Faerie Queene*, III.vi.48.

18. John Milton, *Complete Prose Works*, ed. D. M. Wolfe, et. al., 8 vols. (New Haven, 1953–1980), II, 402–06. I discuss the implications of Milton's "subsequent precedence" in greater detail in "Subsequent Precedence: Milton's Materialistic Reading of Ficino and Tasso," *Surfaces* 6 (1996), 218, http://pum12.pum.umontreal.ca/revues/surfaces/vol6/grossman.html.

Adam must decide where Eve fits, how she is to be distributed within the creaturely symbolic of partakers.

Adam, Eve, and Raphael appear to assume that this means Adam is Eve's head and guide—that she must take his direction, lacking her own. God and Milton are silent about the aptness of this conclusion.[19] If Eve is to be understood by analogy to an oration delivered (and I use the word "delivered" with a glance at her bloody birth from Adam's side) by Adam, then she is his Word, in which his unseen and unseeable part, his rib, his inmost desire—the open "Cell of Fantasy"—may be observed. The familiar patrilineal construction of Eve as an image of the image of God is shadowed by a more interesting (because less noticed) maternal genealogy: God, the father, makes himself visible through his Word, the Son, as Adam makes himself visible through his Word—or dream—Eve. This provides a much more supple and complex model, one which has the added value of exposing again the underlying Oedipality of Adam's love, and by extension ours. Adam, who is born without a mother, gives birth to Eve and makes her a mother. The Son, also created *sole patri*, will come in the fullness of time to the womb of Mary, second Eve, and he—the seed of the woman—will redeem the mother at the expense of the serpent: "Between thee and the Woman I will put / Enmity, and between thine and her Seed; / Her Seed shall bruise thy head, thou bruise his heel" (X, 179–81).

The question of sexual dominion then draws near to the question of textual authority: does Adam control his Word? Embedded in this question is another. Does Milton control his words—that is, control *Paradise Lost*, the manifestation of his wanting and the embodiment of his desire: the "poem doctrinal to the nation" whose deferral Milton laments in *Reason of Church Government* (*Prose* I, 104–15) and worries over in "How soon how hath time" and "When I consider," the textual mother into which he deposits "a potencie of life . . . as active as that soule was whose progeny they are . . . the purest efficacie and extractions of that living intellect that bred them" (*Areopagitica*, *Prose* II, 492), and from which he hopes to be (re)born as England's prophetic poet?

For an answer, I want to revisit the crucial exchange between Adam and Raphael at VIII, 549–94. When Adam says that he well knows that Eve is inferior, but that she seems Absolute, which is the error and which is the insight? Is she really a secondary creation who *seems* to be Absolute

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19. I am indebted to Amy Dunham Stackhouse for pointing this out.

because of some developing flaw in Adam's perceptual perfection, or has the developing perfection of Adam's perception glimpsed something about Eve that undermines Adam's presumed priority? Assuming that Raphael speaks for God and Milton, readers have tended to assume the former. But bracketing for a moment the support Raphael receives from the established tradition of reading the J-text account of the Fall in support of male privilege, when Raphael responds, "Accuse not Nature," on what textual authority does he speak? Can his conclusion be questioned? Is Adam right to be only "half-abashed"? Curiously, we have at this point one question with three aspects: If Eve is the mother of mankind and Adam is a man, then what does it mean that Adam precedes his mother? If Milton is the poet who wrote in *Paradise Lost* a "poem doctrinal to the nation," then what does it mean to say that Milton wrote the poem from which he emerged the author of a national epic, and what might it mean to entertain the possibility that the poem wrote Milton as well? If the speaking subject discovers itself as the posterior effect of its own words, then who speaks?[20]

When Adam says that "Authority and Reason" wait on Eve, as though she were "one intended first, not after made / Occasionally," his greater insight into God may lie in a syntactic reversal. It is, after all, a cultural prejudice that reads the first clause as indicative and the second as subjunctive: since (we think) we know that she is, indeed, "after made / Occasionally" (VIII, 555–56), we take the sentence to mean that Authority and Reason ought not wait on her because she was not "intended first." But a different cultural prejudice might see in Adam's observation the argument that Eve is indeed not "after made," because, if she were, Authority and Reason would not seem to wait on her. Certainly this second possibility would conduce to the more adventurous exercise of Reason, because to understand it, Adam would have to pose questions about God, rather than about his own paradoxically hierarchical relations to "collateral Love." *Paradise Lost* presents a scene in which Eve is created from Adam's rib. But not as "after Made / Occasionally." Perhaps we are to take the word "occasionally" to mean "at the right time," imparting to Eve's creation the New Testament sense of *kairos*, as "in the

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20. Yet another Miltonic permutation of the question occurs in *Eikonoklastes* when Milton asserts that Parliament is the king's "mother" and then finds incestuous Charles's belief that *she* "can neither conceive or bring forth any authoritative act without his masculine coition" (*Complete Prose Works* III, 467).

fullness of time."[21] But insofar as the context still indicates that Eve's is the "second sex," even a kindly reading of Adam's adverb would equate Eve's making with her material manifestation in Adam's sight and suggest a muddled understanding of the distinction between human and divine time. Even if God had not explicitly ruled out Eve's temporal secondariness by telling Adam "I, ere thou spak'st, / Knew it not good for Man to be alone" (VIII, 444–45), it is difficult to imagine how Milton's God could do anything "occasionally," when he is outside time and what he "[wills] is Fate" (VII, 173). God tells Adam that he withheld Eve not because she was an occasional creation, an afterthought, but so that Adam would be "tried" and come to know himself.

This accords with Eve's role as the visible manifestation of what Adam "wants." Abjected from the juncture of desire and lack at which the human subject is situated, she is "in herself complete, so well to know / Her own, that what she wills to do or say, / Seems wisest, virtuousest, discreetest, best" (VIII, 548–50). Why then does Eve seem so disturbingly "Absolute" to Adam? I have argued so far that "seems" in this passage need not necessarily preclude "is."[22] If we react less prescriptively and preemptively than does Raphael, who may be the most sociable but not the smartest angel, we catch in Milton, or at least catch in Milton's text, an acute observation about sexual difference. Adam's problem is that, as he sees it, "when she's not there he's not there, but when he's not there, she's there." Adam's anxiety points to a dissymmetry of the sexes that resists and inverts the normative patriarchal hierarchy. She may be his image, but he can see (behold, possess) himself only as reflected in her eyes. She, however, learned who and what she was early on when she identified with her reflection in the lake, so that when she saw Adam, she immediately knew him as other, and recognized him as less soft, curvaceous, and responsive than her image in the water.

The voice teaches Eve that Adam is her other, her difference, and that together they can propagate "multitudes like thyself." By contrast, he can only see her in terms of want. On first sight she is "Manlike but different sex"; he wanted to see his heart's desire and thus to see his heart, but his bleeding rib instead presents yet another "fair outside," self-contained, even if strategically permeable, absolute, and complete.

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21. I am indebted to my colleague, Sharon Achinstein, for this point.

22. See Julia Walker, " 'For each seem'd either': Free Will and Predestination in *Paradise Lost*," *Milton Quarterly* 20 (March 1986), 13–16.

To God Adam says "Thou hast provided all things: but." All things but Eve, the remainder, the missing part that like the cipher zero completes and enables "all" by standing over against it, "not all." "*Il n'y a pas La femme*," writes Lacan in one of his more notorious pronouncements.[23] There is not "the Woman," because she is "*pas tout*," not all: accorded even by Freud the privacy of her desire (*Was will das Weib*? Freud asks, admitting that he does not know), an outside in touch with itself, the *(w)*hole in the signifying function through which the patriarchal subject constitutively disappears or returns.

After their Fall, Eve, the partaker, will appear to Adam to be "a Rib / Crooked by nature" (X, 884–85). In the disjuncture of the Fall, Eve, who had been the medium that turned his bleeding rib to life and thus to all, becomes again the mere rib from which she was formed, Adam's own purloined rib. Synecdoche reverts to metonymy and the partaker without whom *all* could not be enjoyed is reduced again to a taken part.

Adam asks for Eve because he seeks a peer with whom he can enjoy all things in "collateral amitie," yet as always happens in Milton's epic, the effort toward "collateral amitie" precipitates a hierarchy. By its sheer mimetic force, the rhetoric of feminine priority in *Paradise Lost* discloses this antinomy as the structure underlying patrilineal hierarchy itself. Yes, the poem clearly asserts the tradition that Eve comes after Adam, temporally and in the order of merit, but at least one of its ethical moments may reside in the honesty and precision with which it further demonstrates that Eve follows Adam only because she precedes him.

V

One purpose of the foregoing formal analysis of Milton's presentation of Eve is to reveal the potential of the text to lay before its readers (Milton included) a defining choice that exceeds even those intentions that may be explicit in the text. A case in point comes in Book IX, when, encountering the newly fallen Eve, Adam, having asked for Eve, decides "against his better knowledge" to keep her. Thus, according to the narrator, Adam falls "not deceiv'd, / But fondly overcome with Female charm" (998–99). In a classic essay, Arthur Barker, identifying Adam's *error* as a failure

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23. *"Il n'y a pas La femme*, article défini pour désigner l'universal. *Il n'y a pas La femme puisque . . . de son essence, elle n'est pas toute,"* *Le seminaire de Jaques Lacan*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, Encore (Paris, 1975), XX, 68.

of faith, outlines a different course that Adam might have taken when confronted by Eve's fall. He could have interceded with God on her behalf, taken the blame on himself and relied on God's mercy to find a just way to save them both.[24] Had Adam known what Barker knows, he could have imitated Christ *avant la lettre*, as Eve will soon do (X, 914–36). But in the text we have Adam acted like a man. Rather than take the blame for Eve, he chose to take the blame with her:

> However I with thee have fixt my Lot,
> Certain to undergo like doom; if Death
> Consort with thee, Death is to mee as Life;
> So forcible within my heart I feel
> The Bond of Nature draw me to my own,
> My own in thee, for what thou art is mine;
> Our State cannot be sever'd, we are one,
> One Flesh; to lose thee were to lose myself. (IX, 952–59)

In the extremity of his ethical moment, Adam conceives his choice as *either* eat the fruit and die with Eve, *or* abstain from eating and live without Eve, not alone to be sure—for God, he knows, could make another female—but with the loss, the perpetual absence of this first wife: "Should God create another *Eve*, and I / Another Rib afford, yet loss of thee / Would never from my heart" (IX, 911–13). Barker's greater theological sophistication affords a third way: presume on God's infinite mercy, keep a regenerated Eve, and live. The narrator implies his awareness of this implicit option when he reports strategically that Adam submitted to "what *seem'd* remediless" (IX, 919, my emphasis).

But Adam's choice is not negligible. I, for one, would not have preferred an Adam less insistent on the distinction between Eve and generic woman ("another Eve"). Such an Adam would reduce himself to generic man and jeopardize the adventure of individual identity at the start. The Barker option is theologically satisfying, but its underlying assumption that an unfallen Adam can plead for lost Eve seems facile when set against Adam's understanding of their inextricable inter-subjectivity: "for what thou art is mine; / Our State cannot be sever'd, we are one." I have tried to make the case that Adam's conclusion, if not his choice, is substantively correct. Becoming the subject of a moral choice is a

24. Arthur Barker, "Structural and Doctrinal Patterns in Milton's Later Poems," in *Essays in English Literature from the Renaissance to the Victorian Age Presented to A. S. P. Woodhouse* (Toronto, 1964), p. 91.

complex process, and his having been created first in some form does not imply that the subject of Adam's choice pre-exists his wife.

However, I must be emphatic in insisting that evaluating the options and judging the choice is not the issue. The critical point I wish to make is that neither contemporary patriarchalism nor the narrator's interpretive comments, nor my rhetorical analysis, can or should shut down the issue of Eve's priority. In its formal precision and integrity the *story* is not simply exemplary; it exceeds any intentions that may be ascribed to it. Among a host of possibilities, Adam's choice may be understood as a moment of spiritual blindness brought on by an uxorious overestimation of his conjugal partner or as a transcendent insight into intricately dialectical relations of love and death: the right move made for the wrong reasons or the wrong move made for the right reasons. My own predilection is to take very seriously Adam's notion that if death consorts with Eve, then death is life to him, which I like to read existentially, since our lives are mediated to us as what Heidegger called a "being toward death."[25] The genders of our procreation are intimate with and integral to this mediation. But *the ethical moment of the text*, as opposed to *the determinative moment of choice* depicted in the text, lies not in choosing a reading but in deferring that choice. The ethics of reading and writing a text dwell in unfolding possibilities that are never fully under control.

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25. See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, tr. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York, 1962), pp. 276–311.