

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

A Heretic in the Truth:  
Milton's Construction of the Mediated Woman

by

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## Abstract

This thesis is an examination of those contradictions that complicate John Milton's sexual, social, and theological politics. On the one hand, Milton champions the libertarian ideals of freedom of expression, release from civil tyranny, and liberty of conscience. On the other, he promotes the patriarchal ideas that women should be in silence, that they are to be under the absolute rule of men, and that they are to follow their husbands' behests in matters of faith. Viewed apart from the total context of Milton's libertarianism, his patriarchal ideals have assumed the stature of a bogey, and in this guise they have intimidated many modern female writers. Undoubtedly Milton is a propagandist for patriarchy. But when taken as a whole, his ideology can provide gaps and fissures through which people speaking as feminists may both critique his male supremacy and benefit from his libertarian insights.

The central focus of this thesis is Milton's construction of the prototypical woman within a bourgeois-patriarchal ethic. Several discrepancies are apparent in this prototype. As one of the brotherhood of Man, she is to establish an individual subjectivity premised on the liberal-humanist discourse of freedom, self-determination and rationality. But as a woman, she is silently to subsume her social self in a male's subjectivity. The

Lady in *Comus*, Eve in *Paradise Lost*, and Dalila in *Samson Agonistes* are all examples of female characters in Milton's *oeuvre* who express this inconsistency. This thesis accordingly treats each of these characters in turn in Chapters Two, Three, and Four. Chapter One consists of a study of the contradictions Milton displays in his prose writings. Chapter Five, the conclusion, suggests that we may best approach Milton by placing him in his entire historical context, which would include the words of women as well as men.

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### Abbreviations of Titles of Milton's Works

*Apology--An Apology against a Pamphlet Called "A Modest  
Confutation of the Animadversions upon the  
Remonstrant's Defense against Smectymnus"*

*Areo--Areopagitica*

*CD--De doctrina Christiana (The Christian Doctrine)*

*CM--Columbia edition of the Works of John Milton.*

*DDD--The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*

*Def 2--Johannis Miltoni, Angli, pro populo Anglicano  
defensio secunda (The Second Defense of the English  
People)*

*History--The History of Britain*

*Hughes--Merritt Hughes edition of Milton's Complete Poems  
and Major Prose.*

*PL--Paradise Lost*

*PR--Paradise Regained*

*SA--Samson Agonistes*

*Tetra--Tetrachordon*

*TKM--The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*

*Way--The Readie and Easy Way to Establish a Free  
Commonwealth*

*YP--Yale edition of the Complete Prose Works of John  
Milton.*

Abbreviations of Titles of Critical Works Cited in  
Parenthetical Notes

"Constructing"--Catherine Belsey, "Constructing the  
Subject" in *Feminist Criticism and Social Change*.

*CritPrac*--Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice*.

"Defence"--Percy Bysshe Shelley, "A Defence of Poetry."

"FemCrit"--Elaine Showalter, "The Feminist Critical  
Revolution."

"Garden"--Ashraf H.A. Rushdy, "The Empty Garden."

"Genesis"--Mary Nyquist, "The Genesis of Gendered  
Subjectivity in the Divorce Tracts and in *Paradise  
Lost*."

"Gynesis"--Mary Nyquist, "Gynesis, Genesis, Exegesis, and  
the Formation of Milton's Eve."

*Milton*--Catherine Belsey, *John Milton*.

*MltRev*--Christopher Hill, *Milton and the English  
Revolution*.

*S&S*--Michel Foucault and Richard Sennett, "Sexuality and  
Solitude."

*VinMen*--Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights  
of Men*.

*VinWmn*--Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights  
of Woman*.

"Will"--Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, "The Will to Choose  
or to Reject."

*WTUD*--Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down*.



### A Note on Texts

All references to Milton's poetry will be taken from the Merritt Hughes edition of Milton's *Complete Poems and Major Prose* (1957). All references to Milton's prose will be taken from the Columbia edition of the *Works of John Milton* (1931-40) unless otherwise indicated. Note that I have elected to use the English translations of Milton's Latin prose in Merritt Hughes's *Complete Poems and Major Prose* (1957) over those in the Columbia and Yale editions of Milton's works because of the former's greater accuracy and euphony.

...the sacred Milton was, let it ever be remembered, a republican, and a bold inquirer into morals and religion.

-Percy Bysshe Shelley, Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*

(1819)

...how much soever Arbitrary power may be dislik'd on a Throne, not *Milton* himself wou'd cry up Liberty to poor *Female Slaves*, or plead for the Lawfulness of Resisting a Private Tyranny.

-Mary Astell, *Some Reflections Upon Marriage* (1700)

## Introduction

The feminist critique of the literary canon traditionally has taken two distinct tacks: either the predominantly male-authored texts of the canon have been ignored as irrelevant to the feminist critical project or these texts have been castigated as inimical, inhibiting influences on the progress of female literary criticism and creation. John Milton has long occupied a privileged place in the formal literary canon. As such, he has loomed like a specter over the literary and critical activities of many modern female writers. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in their study of the woman writer and the nineteenth-century literary imagination, *Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), use Virginia Woolf's term "Milton's bogey" to describe the anxiety the woman writer experiences when confronted by the seemingly omnipotent, impervious patriarchal literary tradition. My close reading of Milton's poetical and political works, however, has led me to conclude that, though undoubtedly a propagandist for patriarchy, Milton does not present a monolithic doctrine of male supremacy. In fact, his texts are riddled with tensions which lend themselves to an explicitly feminist interpretation.

The central project of this thesis is thus to challenge the assumption that Milton is an arch-

misogynist. Instead of accepting the blanket indictment of this canonical author, I intend to explicate the contradictions inherent in his political and poetical works and to recoup for a feminist poetics the revolutionary aspects of his thought. I do not intend to act as an apologist for the undercurrent of misogyny which informs Milton's *oeuvre*, an undercurrent which ripples through and often rears into vast waves of sexism in those Renaissance texts influenced by the dual traditions of classicism and christianity. However, I believe that Milton's texts offer a range of possibilities of meaning, and that often the feminist polemic against Milton itself has served to embed the misogynistic aspects of his thought in the public imagination while ignoring the libertarian tenets he posits.

I draw the title of my thesis, *A Heretic in the Truth*, from Milton's defense of free speech and thought, *Areopagitica*. In short, a heretic in the truth is one who accepts a creed unquestioningly, who follows the prescriptions of authority without subjecting them to the rigorous examination of her or his own reason. Contradicting his own deep conviction that faith should never be implicit, Milton elsewhere in his discourse nevertheless enunciates a specific epistemology of mediation for women. Despite the fact that in

*Areopagitica* he defines freedom of thought as the most fundamental aspect of rational human intercourse and that in *Paradise Lost* he describes the prototypical woman as an inherently rational creature, in the ethical scheme he constructs for humankind it is to be "[h]ee for God only, shee for God in him" (PL 4: 299). Yet, though often used as a rallying cry by defenders of patriarchal privilege, this iambic pentameter formulation of orthodox Pauline doctrine is not unambiguously supported by the balance of Milton's domestic epic. This uneasy construction of the mediated woman, then, is the metaphor I use to articulate the uneven character of Milton's sexual, social, and theological politics.

The methodology I employ to interpret Milton's texts draws on the techniques and vocabulary of various contemporary interpretative paradigms, including historical-critical scholarship, reader-response criticism, and feminist hermeneutics. Using these theoretical tools, I will interrogate Milton's texts in their broad historical contexts so that I may explore his contradictory construction of the female prototype. I will also emphasize in my analysis of Milton's texts the ways in which his thought has been interpreted by readers according to their own implicit ideological agendas as either defenders or opposers of male supremacy as

epitomized by the specter of Milton. In other words, the bogey of Milton is itself a critical construct, and it is this construction of Milton that I also mean to question. Ultimately I will suggest a reading strategy that, by casting down both Milton the idol and Milton the strawman, can self-consciously engage his works and so articulate his complex attitudes toward the liberty of Man, men, and women.

## Chapter One:

### Milton and the Mediation of Women

John Milton: his is a name synonymous in many minds with liberty of conscience, freedom from tyranny, and rebellion against oppression. Mary Shelley's sore beset Creature declaims in Miltonic tones as he rebels against the constraints of an unjust society:

All, save I, were at rest or in enjoyment; I, like the arch-fiend, bore a hell within me,<sup>1</sup> and finding myself unsympathized with, wished to tear up the trees, spread havoc and destruction around me, and then to have sat down and enjoyed the ruin.

\*\*\*

And now, with the world before me, whither should I bend my steps?<sup>2</sup> I resolved to fly far from the scene of my misfortunes; but to me, hated and despised, every country must be equally horrible. (177, 180)

Shelley's husband, Percy, also refers to Milton in order to denounce the evils of intolerant and arbitrary tyranny:

Implacable hate,<sup>3</sup> patient cunning, and a sleepless refinement of device to inflict the extremest anguish on an enemy, these things are evil; and, although venial in a slave, are not

to be forgiven in a tyrant....Milton's Devil as a moral being is as far superior to his God, as one who perseveres in some purpose which he has conceived to be excellent in spite of adversity and torture, is to one who in the cold security of undoubted triumph inflicts the most horrible revenge upon his enemy, not from any mistaken notion of inducing him to repent of a perseverance in enmity, but with the alleged design of exasperating him to deserve new torments. ("Defence" 1081-82)

Mary Wollstonecraft, mother to the libertarian sentiments of both Percy and Mary Shelley,<sup>4</sup> a generation earlier employed Miltonic terms to support her conviction that "servility to superiors, and tyranny to inferiors" corrupts the entire body politic:

Among unequals there can be no society;<sup>5</sup>--giving a manly meaning to the term; from such intimacies friendship can never grow; if the basis of friendship is mutual respect, and not a commercial treaty. (*VinMen* 92)

Mary Astell, one of Wollstonecraft's literary forebears, likewise alludes to Milton when she speaks of the pernicious effects of tyranny:



He who has Sovereign Power does not value the Provocations of a Rebellious Subject, but knows how to subdue him with ease, and will make himself obey'd; but Patience and Submission are the only Comforts left to a poor People, who groan under Tyranny, unless they are Strong enough to break the Yoke, to Depose and Abdicate.... (28-29)

As each of these examples demonstrates, the inalienable right to liberty that Milton espouses throughout his polemical and poetical works empowered writers like Astell, Wollstonecraft, Percy Shelley, and Mary Shelley to speak in their own historical moments for a revolution in individual manners and for a release from hegemonic institutions.

Milton's self-proclaimed mission as defender of the people of England was to extend the purview of spiritual, political, and personal liberty.<sup>8</sup> "The whole freedom of man," he asserts in *The Readie and Easy Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth* (1660), which Christopher Hill justly praises as "that very brave book" (*WTUD* 323), "consists either in spiritual or civil libertie" (*CM* 6: 141). Liberty of conscience, sanctioned by the light of God's spirit implanted in the breast of every true believer, demands that each individual be free to interpret God's

word as inscribed in the Christian scriptures without the mediating influence of any temporal judge or ruler. The necessary concomitant to liberty of conscience, civil liberty is premised on the democratic principle of meritocracy. Denouncing hereditary birthright and promulgating the protestant work ethic, Milton argues that in a free commonwealth promising men may "exercise and fit themselves, till thir lot fall to be chosen into the Grand Council, according as thir worth and merit shall be taken notice of by the people" (CM 6: 145). In his *Second Defense of the People of England*, Milton additionally cites domestic liberty among those "species of liberty which are essential to the happiness of social life" ([Hughes] 830-31). Domestic liberty, he explains here, is contingent upon "the conditions of the conjugal tie, the education of the children, and the free publication of the thoughts" ([Hughes] 831)--three material questions which he explicates at length in his divorce tracts, *Of Education*, and *Areopagitica*. The claim to liberty, which Milton insists is the natural inheritance of every freeborn man, thus justifies resistance to self-serving kings and magistrates. "There is no power but of God," Milton quotes Paul with approval (Rom. 13: 1-2; *TKM* CM 5: 16); therefore, free men need not kneel to any tyrant, by

definition one who exploits the provisional power ceded to him by the people for his own ends.<sup>7</sup>

The liberty which Milton so loved seems eminently laudable. Indeed, his brand of opposition to ecclesiastical and civil tyranny prepared the way for the modern democratic institutions that many people enjoy today. Nevertheless, his egalitarianism ultimately was limited by his unquestioning accession to humanist principles and orthodox Pauline theology. Milton founded his libertarian creed on the belief that "all men naturally were borne free, being the image and resemblance of God himself, and were, by privilege above all the creatures, born to command, and not to obey" (*TKM* CM 5: 8). Yet behind his universal sounding rhetoric is the unspoken liberal assumption that the words person and individual denote only male persons and male individuals. Because it is based on an interpretation of the world which posits 'man' as the "origin and source of meaning, of action, and of history" (Belsey, *CritPrac*, 7), the liberal-humanist discourse of freedom, self-determination and rationality that Milton employs inevitably excludes female persons from its fundamental tenets by the very terms of its construction.

Milton, however, was not simply a humanist, for his prose writings indicate that he was an undeniable male.

supremacist. Merging his humanist sensibilities with Pauline prescriptions, Milton moved beyond the tacit assumption that the normative human being is necessarily male to an explicit exegetical demonstration that males only are made in the express image of God. In *Tetrachordon*, where he collates Christ's teachings on divorce with the law of Moses in order to establish his doctrine of domestic liberty, he assiduously attempts to prove as part of his ideological project that "the woman is not primarily and immediatly the image of God, but in reference to the man" (*Tetra* CM 4: 76). Fixing the masculine pronoun in the male subject to support his claim for man's supremacy, he further remarks that the reference to "male and female" in the Pentateuch's first creation account (Gen. 1: 26-28)<sup>a</sup> must be interpreted through the description of woman's creation from man in its second account of humanity's inception (Gen. 2: 7-25):

this male and female is by the explicite words of God himselfe heer declar'd to be not meant other then a fit help, and meet society; som who would ingrosse to themselves the whole trade of interpreting, will not suffer the cleer text of God to doe the office of explaining it self.

(CM 4: 82-83)

To the contradictions in these two scriptural accounts of creation, which certainly do not seem so clear to many competent Biblical commentators,<sup>9</sup> he confidently retorts:

He that said, *Male and female created he them*,  
 immediatly before that said also in the same  
 verse, *In the Image of God created he him*, and  
 redoubl'd it, that our thoughts might not be so  
 full of dregs as to urge this poor consideration  
 of *male and female*, without remembering the  
 noblenes of that former repetition. (CM 4: 81)

Mary Nyquist, who in "The Genesis of Gendered Subjectivity in the Divorce Tracts and in *Paradise Lost*" (1987) meticulously traces Milton's progressive gendering of the generic subject, concludes from such evidence that Milton's exegesis of the two creation stories in Genesis makes possible an "ideologically charged and historically specific" reading of the contentious phrase 'created man in his *own* image' that "tends to restrict the meaning of 'man' to an individual Adam, from whom and for whom the female is then made" (106). Conforming to his view that man is made in God's image while woman is made through and for man, Milton's defense of "the dearest interests, not merely of one people, but of the whole human race, against the enemies of human liberty" (*Def* 2 [Hughes] 820) accordingly comes down to the transference of power from

one centralized head of state to numerous heads of households. English men under a "governour supreme," Milton insists,

are indeed under tyranny and servitude; as wanting that power, which is the root and sourse of all liberty, to dispose and *economize* in the Land which God hath giv'n them, as Maisters of Family in thir own house and free inheritance.

(TKM CM 5: 40)

The title, master and lord, which Milton maintains must be banished from a free state, thus maintains its place of privilege in the state's households.

When we consider what Nyquist identifies as Milton's ideologically motivated project to link the signifier 'man' to the male signified, we must not lose sight of the fact that this claim to kinship with God underlay not only Milton's libertarian doctrines, but also the arguments of those female contemporaries and near-contemporaries of Milton who sought to achieve human dignity as females through recourse to the Christian scriptures.<sup>10</sup> In *A Houzell for Melastomus, the cynicall bayter of, and foul mouthed barker against Evahs sex* (1617), one of several responses to the misogynous tract, *The Araignment of Lewde, idle, froward, and unconstant women* (1615), Rachel Speght assumes a polemical stance as a bold, vocal woman

on the basis of an egalitarian interpretation of Gen. 1: 27 diametrically opposed to Milton's own: "in the image of God were they both created; yea, and to be brief, all the parts of their bodies, both external and internal, were correspondent and meet each for other" (69). On the eve of the Interregnum, a group of women, who petitioned the English Parliament in support of the Leveller's plea of 11 September 1648 for liberty of speech, person, representation, conscience and commerce, also established their right to speak by insisting that,

since we are assured of our creation in the image of God, and of an interest in Christ equal unto men, as also of a proportionable share in the freedoms of this commonwealth, we cannot but wonder and grieve that we should appear so despicable in your eyes as to be thought unworthy to petition or represent our grievances to this honourable House. Have we not an equal interest with the men of this nation in those liberties and securities contained in the *Petition of Right*, and other the good laws of the land?...And must we keep at home in our houses, as if our lives and liberties and all were not concerned?<sup>11</sup>

(Woodhouse 367-8)

Margaret Fell Fox, seven years after the restoration of the Stuart monarch to the English throne, further extended this tradition of biblically based feminist protest in her tract, *Womens Speaking Justified, Proved and Allowed of by the Scriptures* (1667). In this tract Fell Fox asserts that the creation story in the first chapter of Genesis clearly establishes the common humanity of men and women, and so renders the customary notion of sexual difference used by patriarchal authorities to silence women in the church and state extremely suspect: "Here God joyns them together in his own Image, and makes no such distinctions and differences as men do....And God hath put no such difference between the Male and Female as men would make" (3).

Milton's reiterated contention that woman was not made in the direct image of God, disseminated during those indeterminate decades of the 1640s and 1650s in which the social signs of an authoritative, patriarchal culture were increasingly coming apart, when placed in the context of the words of these seventeenth-century women consequently seems motivated by an explicitly male supremacist creed. In particular, such doctrines seem to have been promulgated specifically to stymie the progress of females who maintained that their constitution as human beings made in the image of God justified their claim to full



civil and religious liberty. Milton admits as much in *The Second Defense*, where he states that,

he in vain makes a vaunt of liberty in the senate or in the forum, who languishes under the vilest servitude, to an inferior at home. On this subject, therefore, I published some books which were more particularly necessary at that time when man and wife were often most inveterate foes, when the man often stayed to take care of his children at home, while the mother of the family was seen in the camp of the enemy, threatening death and destruction to her husband.<sup>12</sup> ([Hughes] 831)

It appears, then, that not only did Milton reject the egalitarian interpretations of the relationship between the sexes which were circulated in mid-seventeenth century England, as Nyquist suggests, but that he actively entered this ideological fray as an attacker of those women who dared to encroach upon the traditional turf of freeborn Englishmen.

Milton, who genders generic man as specifically male, thus narrowed his notions of spiritual, civil, and domestic liberty to the few whom he deemed fit: an exclusive coterie which in his mind did not include females. With respect to spiritual liberty, for instance,

Milton limits the Puritan conviction that each individual should interpret scripture through inner spiritual illumination only--a conviction with which he prefaces his own systematic reading of the Bible, *The Christian Doctrine*--with his staunch masculinist interpretation of the Pauline injunction in 1Cor. 14: 34-35 that a woman should receive her spiritual instruction from her husband alone. In the body of *The Christian Doctrine*, he actually cites this Pauline proscription of women's free speech in order to modify his apparently general statement that,

each believer in turn should be authorized to speak, or prophesy, or teach, or exhort, according to his gifts; insomuch that even the weakest among the brethren had the privilege of asking questions, and consulting the elders and more experienced members of the congregation.

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Women, however, are enjoined to keep silence.

(CM 16: 325, 327)

Following the pattern established in his prose, where he interprets Paul's comments in the first epistle to the Corinthians to mean that all women are always "enjoined to keep silence in the church"<sup>13</sup> (CM 16: 327), Milton in his poetry portrays Eve as the prototypical Pauline woman. True to the patriarchal pattern imposed on her, Milton's

Eve decorously submits to her spouse that "God is thy Law, thou mine: to know no more/Is woman's happiest knowledge and her praise" (PL 4: 637-38; cf. 8: 52-57).

If a woman's claim to liberty of conscience is seriously undermined by the Pauline principles Milton uses to support his doctrine of Christian liberty, her rights as a citizen are not even considered. In the free commonwealth Milton outlines in *The Readie and Easy Way*, it will be men who are fitted to govern through an improved educational system; men who will elect the nation's civil representatives; men who will monitor the expression of the country's religious ideals: this, according to Milton, is "the noblest, the manliest, the equallest, the justest government, the most agreeable to all due libertie and proportiond equalitie, both human, civil, and Christian" (CM 6: 119). Furthermore, the domestic liberties which Milton maintains constitute the basis of a free commonwealth are themselves founded on the necessary suppression of female speech, independence, and self-determination. To cope with this contradiction, Milton several times shifts the subject/sovereign analogy to suit his varying political ends: one moment he argues that the head of state is in fact subject to the people, since he was created for them, and another that the head of the household is an absolute sovereign in his realm,

since woman was made for man. Specifically, in *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* he reasons that the prerogative which permits the sovereign to possess rights above those of his subjects is absurd: "Unless the people must be thought created all for him, he not for them, and they all in one body inferior to him single, which were a kinde of treason against the dignitie of mankind to affirm" (CM 5: 11); while in *Tetrachordon* he insists that the doctrine which says a sovereign has rights above his subjects is sacred: "For certainly if man be liable to injuries in marriage...and man be the worthier person, it were a preposterous law to respect only the less worthy; her whom God made for mariage, and not him at all for whom mariage was made" (CM 4: 122). Milton's inconsistent logic becomes glaringly apparent in a sociopolitical metaphor, used in *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* to bolster his argument for each man's unrestricted right to repudiate his mate, that clashes with his sexual political position that each man is the king of his own castle:

He who marries, intends as little to conspire  
his own ruine, as he that swears Allegiance: and  
as a whole people is in proportion to an ill  
Government, so is one man to an ill mariage. If  
they against any authority, Covnant, or Statute,  
may by the soveraign edict of charity, save not

only their lives, but honest liberties from unworthy bondage, as well may he against any private Covnant, which hee never enter'd to his mischief, redeem himself from unsupportable disturbances to honest peace, and just contentment. (CM 3, ii: 374)

As David Aers and Bob Hodge note,

As the "whole people" are to government, so a "man" is to marriage. But surely, for Milton, it is a man who governs in marriage: the analogy would work more naturally, in keeping with his general account of marriage, if it went, "people:government :: wife:husband." This would give the oppressed wife the full right Milton denies her, of rebellion against what she herself judges to be "unworthy bondage." The effect of Milton's use of bondage is to make women nonpeople, as the lower classes in general were in his version of the liberal ethic.<sup>14</sup> (9)

The "glorious rising Commonwealth" (Way CM 6: 116) that Milton envisions, then, is to be rife with contradictions. Men will speak while women should be in silence. Male children will be educated to the benefit of the nation; female children must learn to adorn men's leisure hours. Man basks as ever in the light of his

Great Taskmaster's eye; women's access to the light of God is blocked by the intermediary that is man. Evidently, the sort of liberty for which Milton crusaded was to encompass only those human beings included under the carefully gendered heading, "free Persons" (*TKM* CM 5: 9). Women and unpropertied men<sup>15</sup> were beyond the pale.

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Women speaking as feminists<sup>16</sup> have noted these inconsistencies in Milton's politics for centuries. Initiating the most recent feminist critique of Milton's poetry, Marcia Landy in her article "Kinship and the Role of Women in *Paradise Lost*" (1972) argues that marriage in Milton's epic poem alternatively functions as a trope for male authority and as a trap for female autonomy. Eschewing the false neutrality of liberal humanist criticism, she undertakes a detailed analysis of the complex network of familial relationships that govern the sexes in Milton's literary cosmos. Her cogent conclusion is that Milton, while granting man full creative powers, limits woman to the cycle of procreation. Also assuming a rigorous feminist approach to questions of sexual politics in Milton's poetry, Sandra Gilbert in "Patriarchal Poetry and Women Readers: Reflections on Milton's Bogey" (1978) additionally examines the effect the cultural icon that is Milton's bogey had on women writers from Mary

Wollstonecraft to Virginia Woolf. Expanding her thesis about the inimical influence the specter of Milton had on the aspirations of some nineteenth-century Anglo-American women writers, Gilbert, with Sandra Gubar, in the introductory chapters of *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) details the differing responses that male writers and female writers as distinctive classes had to Milton's image and *oeuvre*. Male writers like Gerard Manley Hopkins, Gilbert and Gubar argue, were empowered by the intensely phallic presence figured by Milton, while female writers such as Woolf, Shelley, and the Brontes felt disabled by this vast, overshadowing patriarchal phantom. Lastly, in her 1983 paper, "When Eve Reads Milton: Undoing the Canonical Economy," Christine Froula too asserts this perception of Milton as a charter member of the privileged masculinist canon which functions to suppress women's voices. She accordingly argues that Milton's epic presence is necessarily based on women's absence: that is, if "the epic tradition has in a very real sense been built upon female silence, then the patriarchal authority Milton establishes in *Paradise Lost* is not mere precondition for his story; it *is* that story" (339).

Significantly, these three twentieth-century feminist critics of the contradictions inherent in Milton's politics and poetry possess a strong precedent in the

works of the late-eighteenth century feminist Mary Wollstonecraft, whose *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) is still one of the most incisive analyses of bourgeois patriarchal culture. In this *Vindication*, Wollstonecraft, who highlights the inconsistencies in Milton's social theology, ultimately earmarks him as a rank male supremacist who seeks to establish an essential difference between the sexes in order to render women sweet, soft, seductive creatures, fitted only "to gratify the senses of man when he can no longer soar on the wing of contemplation" (19). Moreover, Wollstonecraft herself found a precursor for her critical project in Mary Astell's *Some Reflections Upon Marriage* (1700), which arguably contains the first written feminist response to Milton:

how much soever Arbitrary Power may be dislik'd  
on a Throne, Not *Milton* himself wou'd cry up  
Liberty to poor *Female Slaves*, or plead for the  
Lawfulness of Resisting a Private Tyranny. (29)

Undoubtedly, the uneven conjunction of Milton's various ideologies--his libertarianism and male supremacism, in particular--provided women from the eighteenth to the twentieth century with spaces through which to question the construction of the patriarchal culture he so zealously promoted.



Since Landy's seminal analysis of Milton's sexual politics various rebuttals have been directed against the late twentieth-century feminist critique of this canonized author. Critics such as Barbara Lewalski, Joan Malory Webber, and Diane McColley, for instance, all attempt to provide compensatory readings of *Paradise Lost* that would redeem the now fallen Milton. Lewalski argues in "Milton on Women--Yet Once More" (1974) that,

Far from being relegated to an exclusively or primarily domestic role, Milton's Eve participates fully in the entire range of prelapsarian human activities--education, working in and sharing responsibility for the human environment (the garden), discussing and analyzing new experience, exercising her powers of symbolization in naming the plants, composing love poetry and divine praises. (3)

Webber pointedly sacrifices "the cause of women to that of humanity" (5) so that she may argue for what she sees as the liberating aspects for women, in particular, of Milton's politics and poetics: his conviction that "true heroism requires patience, martyrdom, and loneliness (8); his notion of the movement of God's creation towards total harmony (8-9); his 'feminization' of God's Son (9); and his accession to Eve of a degree of independent power

uncommon in ancient patriarchal cultures (10). Finally, McColley asserts that Milton's texts bear distinctly proto-feminist traces, since in order for Milton's theodicy to be convincing woman also must be free to fall and sufficient to withstand temptation and since free-will is the basis of social and spiritual liberty. The Arminian Milton, she argues, to satisfy a divine scheme founded on free will had to create in contrast to that of previous misogynous commentators an Eve

who answers, and who might even at the moment of "too easie entrance" have continued to answer, to Adam's words of faith, which are also Milton's summons to his reader, "God towards thee hath done his part, do thine." (3)

Lewalski, Webber, and McColley, as Janet E. Halley points out in her article "Female Autonomy in Milton's Sexual Poetics" (1988), all base their defense of Milton on the assumption that "the application of contemporary feminist thinking to Milton is ahistorical" (230). Of course, this position is quite simply wrong. Notwithstanding the feminist sentiments of such seventeenth-century women as Rachel Speght, Katherine Chidley, Mary Astell, and Margaret Fell Fox, among others,<sup>17</sup> scholars like Ellen A. McArthur, Ethyn Morgan Williams, Keith Thomas, and Phyllis Mack have worked from

the beginning of the twentieth century to document the voiced demands of seventeenth-century women for gender equity at home, in the church, and in the state.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, not only do such critics as Lewalski, Webber, and McColley weaken their responses to the feminist critique of Milton with their easy acceptance of a patriarchal reading of history which discounts the discourse of women even when recorded, but they also render their attempted resurrection of Milton's damaged reputation as a defender of liberty for all extremely suspect through their reliance on decontextualized quotations from Milton's writings. Webber, for instance, like many other critics,<sup>19</sup> cites Milton's statement in *Tetrachordon* that "the wiser should govern the lesse wise, whether male or female" without noting the codicils Milton clearly enunciates: this situation is an exception; it is governed by the husband's approval; and it is premised on the "indeleble character of priority [with] which God crown'd" men (*Tetra* CM 4: 77; Webber 14). Lewalski and McColley, moreover, when they attempt to counter Adam's privileges (such as that of naming the animals, and Eve) with Eve's similar, but subordinate, tasks (naming the flowers) lapse into what Mary Nyquist identifies as the liberal-humanist tendency to neutralize blatantly hierarchical differences by emphasizing "formal balance

and harmonious pairing" ("Genesis" 99-100). In sum, the apologies for Milton which attempt to translate his unambiguously stated male supremacism into proto-feminist sentiments suffer from what Milton himself, in another context, castigates as a "violence to the language" which proceeds by laying down "premises without a proof" (CD CM 15: 11, 17).

However, the blanket condemnations of Milton as an unswerving woman-hater also suffer from this same fault: the incomplete transcription of his intricate sacred, secular, and sexual politics. Like those critics who try to defend Milton against charges of sexual discrimination by fallaciously excising favorable phrases from their contexts in his works, those who attack Milton as a representative misogynist are also guilty of presenting a partial picture of his exceedingly complex views through their selective use of certain proof texts. Indisputably, such estimations of woman as "sinister," a "Rib/Crooked by nature," a "defect/Of nature" (PL 10: 886, 884-85, 891-92), as "less excellent" than man (PL 8: 566), and as one who is "far excell'd" by man in "all real dignity" (PL 10: 150-51) mark Milton's characters in certain moments as misogynous. Moreover, Milton himself repeatedly displays his own male supremacist views throughout his prose works. His opinions that the husband must maintain "superior

rights" in a marriage (*CD CM* 15: 121), that a woman cannot contribute to a civil code since "Laws are Masculin Births" (*A story* 10: 26), and that women are not to speak in the congregation all reinforce his conclusion that men should rule over women. Yet, the premises Milton puts forward about women's inherently rational nature and fundamental free will, about the primary importance of spiritual and intellectual intercourse between the sexes, and about the inefficacy of the sexual double standard,<sup>20</sup> though used by him to support his position on the superiority of men over women and of man's consequent place of privilege in the newly constituted bourgeois companionate marriage, do prepare the way for feminist thinking.

Whether or not Milton intended these premises to empower women in their struggle for freedom from oppressive masculinist codes is nevertheless a moot point.<sup>21</sup> Still, to recognize the revolutionary import of some of Milton's ideas and to evaluate the worth of such concepts for women moving for emancipation from oppressive patriarchal constructs, we need not entangle ourselves in a maze of unanswerable questions about his intentions. The fact is that, just as the fundamental Puritan notion that each individual possessed the right to interpret the Bible without the interference of any man-made mediating

influence enabled Milton's female contemporaries to speak out as women on behalf of women,<sup>22</sup> so too do the ideas about women's rationality, marriage's mutuality, and human liberty which Milton promotes prepare the way for the feminist critiques of patriarchal culture by such thinkers as Mary Astell, Mary Wollstonecraft, and the twentieth-century feminists cited above.

But the attack on Milton as an unrelenting icon of misogyny is not only marred by sketchy scholarly techniques. In addition, it is further limited by what materialist feminist critics have identified as the unwitting valorization of men and male rule as "a monolithic, totally different and controlling out-there" by those who want to read all women as inevitable victims of a vast patriarchal plot (Newton and Rosenfelt xxvi). As Judith Newton and Deborah Rosenfelt point out, men too are "ideologically inscribed" within their particular cultures (xxvi). Hence, the danger with entering a binary opposition that sets all men against all women in a battle of the sexes is that it ignores real differences between men (and, of course, between women). Class, color, country, and condition are determinants that cross gender boundaries. This being so, the oppression of women by men is best theorized within a pyramidal rather than a dualistic model.<sup>23</sup>

Furthermore, the ideology that mediates the social subject's relation to the material conditions of her or his existence must be understood to be "in no sense a set of deliberate distortions foisted upon a helpless working class by a corrupt and cynical bourgeoisie (or upon victimized women by violent and power hungry men)" (Belsey, "Constructing," 46). Instead, ideology in general exists as "the necessary condition of action" in any given cultural economy that "obscures the real conditions of existence by presenting partial truths" (46). Because this ideology is a matrix of omissions and gaps which merely appear to elide contradictions in the social formation, it is therefore eminently breachable. Accordingly, since the ideology of patriarchal culture in particular is neither monolithic nor inevitable, men and women speaking against the prescriptions of male supremacy may well unravel patriarchy's oppressive net of customs and superstitions. Milton's "radically bourgeois" system of sexual politics (Nyquist, "Genesis," 106)--itself a site of cultural contestation rent by numerous internal contradictions--consequently can offer feminist thinkers tools with which to tear the seeming impervious firmament of male supremacist ideologies instituted to silence female voices and suppress female activity, notions which

many commentators at the end of the twentieth century still dismiss as seventeenth-century 'common-sense.'<sup>24</sup>

Still, Milton's texts do promote the strengthening of patriarchal institutions. As he himself indicates, women in the new system of things he envisions will be freed somewhat simply to make men's subjugation of them that much more glorious:

Therefore his [Paul's] precept is, *Wives be subject to your husbands as is fit in the Lord*, Coloss. 3.18. *In every thing*, Eph. 5. 24. Nevertheless man is not to hold her as a servant, but receives her into a part of that empire which God proclaims him to, though not equally, yet largely, as his own image and glory: for it is no small glory to him, that a creature so like him, should be made subject to him.

(*Tetra* CM 4: 76)

Since Milton's texts are marked both by such overt male supremacist statements and by premises that have indeed proved useful for the burgeoning feminist movement, we therefore must move away from single-minded critical attitudes that cast Milton as either an idol of the libertarian cause or a misogynistic strawman. Instead, we need to engage self-consciously in a vigilant analysis of



his works that will articulate the values and the limitations of his notions of domestic, social, and spiritual liberty for women seeking the right to equality of opportunity in the modern era.

Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza has proposed just such a "hermeneutics of suspicion" for use in an exegesis of the Christian scriptures that is both feminist-critical and historical-concrete<sup>25</sup> ("Will" 130). Fiorenza's feminist interpretative model of critical evaluation includes the following key elements:

- (1) suspicion rather than acceptance of biblical authority, (2) critical evaluation rather than correlation, (3) interpretation through proclamation, (4) remembrance and historical reconstruction, and (5) interpretation through celebration and ritual. (130)

For our purposes as readers and re-evaluators of Milton's works, a suspicious attitude toward the authority of the word and a keen evaluative approach are most pertinent. We need to name Milton's male supremacism for what it is. But we also need to recognize the potentials his libertarian discourse does hold for women. Significantly, the inconsistencies in his formulations enable us to do so. The gaps, fissures, and contradictions in his doctrines of liberty themselves reveal his system of male

supremacism to be a construct--and a system very uneasily constructed, at that.

## Chapter Two:

### *Comus* and the Test of a Woman's Truth

[T]hat which purifies us is triall, and triall is by what is contrary. That vertue therefore which is but a youngling in the contemplation of evill, and knows not the utmost that vice promises to her followers, and rejects it, is but a blank vertue, not a pure; her whiteness is but an excrementall whiteness; Which was the reason why our sage and serious poet *Spencer*..., describing true temperance under the person of *Guion*, brings him in with his palmer through the cave of Mammon, and the bowr of earthly blisse that he might see and know, and yet abstain.

(CM 4: 311)

So says Milton in *Areopagitica*, his speech to the Parliament of England in support of freedom of expression and liberty of conscience for the citizens of the new commonwealth. Yet, as Milton maintains here and elsewhere, full freedom and liberty belong only to the virtuous,<sup>1</sup> and a person is purely virtuous only insofar as he<sup>2</sup> is proved by trial. The model moral being Milton constructs in *Areopagitica* consequently must face trial with practiced temperance:

He that can apprehend and consider vice with all her baits and seeming pleasures, and yet abstain, and yet distinguish, and yet prefer that which is truly better, he is the true warfaring Christian. (CM 4: 311)

Furthermore, in a paradox that lies at the crux of Milton's doctrine of Christian liberty, this person's temperate refusal of the excesses of vice entitles him to try the full array of experiences available to human beings:

To the pure, all things are pure, not only meats and drinks, but all kinde of knowledge whether of good or evill; the knowledge cannot defile, nor consequently the books, if the will and conscience be not defil'd. (CM 4: 308)

Members of the radical Ranter sect, who blasphemed, cursed, and whored in the name of a Christian's liberty from all conventional legal and ethical restraints, would push this proposition to its logical limits.<sup>3</sup> Milton's promiscuous reader, however, is to adhere to a doctrine of internalized discipline designed to prevent such breaches of middle-class morality. As Catherine Belsey says, such a person "possesses an inner adequacy which precedes all temptation and which promises victory over evil" (*Milton* 86). Guided by God's spirit within, Milton's paradigmatic

wayfaring, warfaring Christian accordingly represents "the quintessence of radical individualism"<sup>4</sup> (Hill, *WTUD*, 332). Already armed with absolute integrity of conscience, which nonetheless needs to be constantly honed by trial, this individual must meet his Maker alone.

Trial in this context thus takes on distinctly judicial connotations. The lone individual is tested in the sight of God only; but, because God inheres in the breast of each believer, the individual subject to trial must monitor himself. To be able simultaneously to see, to know, and to abstain, the social being constructed by Milton's bourgeois ethic therefore must be subjected at the most intimate level to a rigorous regime of self-censorship. Milton's model citizen, in sum, is freed from the constraints of an external censor--those whom Milton condemns in *Areopagitica* as patriarchal licensers (CM 4: 325)--only to fall subject to the strict supervision of his own "strong siding champion Conscience"<sup>5</sup> (*Comus* 212).

In the free and tolerant marketplace of ideas Milton describes in *Areopagitica*, Truth itself is to be put to the test:

And though all the windes of doctrin were let loose to play upon the earth, so Truth be in the field, we do injuriously by licencing and prohibiting to misdoubt her strength. Let her

and Falshood grapple; who ever knew Truth put to  
 the wors, in a free and open encounter. Her  
 confuting is the best and surest suppressing.  
 (CM 4: 347)

Men of conscience accordingly are required to try their  
 mettle by boldly stepping into this arena of debate:

When a man hath been labouring the hardest  
 labour in the deep mines of knowledge, hath  
 furnisht out his findings in all their equipage,  
 drawn forth his reasons as it were a battell  
 raung'd, scatter'd and defeated all objections  
 in his way, calls out his adversary into the  
 plain, offers him the advantage of wind and sun,  
 if he please; only that he may try the matter by  
 dint of argument.

(CM 4: 347-48)

Strengthened by close association with the central  
 metaphysical presence in Milton's cosmos--the Almighty  
 God--Truth, when left unfettered by mortal customs and  
 traditions, inevitably will reign supreme in this contest.  
 This already determined outcome nevertheless does not  
 preclude an individual's participation in "the wars of  
 Truth" (CM 4: 348), for it is precisely by testing the  
 truth of the canonized texts of Christianity that Milton's  
 moral subject becomes authorized to explore reflexively

"the self, the soul and the heart," to tell the truth of himself to self and others (Foucault, *S&S*, 11). By faithfully following the "obligations of truth" (11), the individual thus puts on a new personality: that of the seemingly integral self.

Milton's message in *Areopagitica* is clear: a champion in the war of truth must not force Truth into a man-made mold, but neither should he blind himself to Truth's manifold aspects:

Yet it is not impossible that she may have more shapes than one. What else is all that rank of things indifferent, wherein Truth may be on this side, or on the other, without being unlike her self? (CM 4: 348)

Significantly, this battle between the various facets of truth and falsehood was precipitated by an even more primordial violence:

Truth indeed came once into the world with her divine Master, and was a perfect shape most glorious to look on: but when he ascended, and his Apostles after him were laid asleep, then strait arose a wicked race of deceivers, who as that story goes of the *Egyptian Typhon* with his conspirators, how they dealt with the good *Osiris*, took the virgin Truth, hewed her lovely

form into a thousand peeces, and scatter'd them to the four winds. From that time ever since, the sad friends of Truth, such as durst appear, imitating the carefull search that *Isis* made for the mangl'd body of *Osiris*, went up and down gathering up limb by limb still as they could find them.

(CM 4: 337-38)

The task of modern lovers of truth is thus comparable to *Isis's*: the reconstruction of Truth's body from the scattered remains of her corpse. A truly Pygmalion effort (or if you prefer, Frankensteinian), the fair, and feminine, form of truth is consequently to be rebuilt by men whose varying contributions to the body of truth will result not in a monstrous patchwork being, but in a sweet and attractive "*homogeneal*, and proportionall" shape (CM 4: 339).

But suppose that Truth is not a woman. Instead, suppose for a moment that a woman wants to speak to the constitution of Truth. This is the case in *Comus*, the masque which Milton presented at Ludlow Castle in 1634 and later revised for publication in 1637.<sup>8</sup> As many critics have noted, the female protagonist in Milton's Ludlow masque conforms closely to the pattern of ethical behavior outlined by Milton in *Areopagitica*.<sup>7</sup> One whose purity is



tested in that notorious den of vice, the castle of Comus, the Lady stands as a prototype for the Christian hero Milton will elaborate in his later prose and poetry. Though immersed in the bowels of a sensual sty, she does not wear her chastity as an "excrementall whitenesse" (*Areo* CM 4: 311), but consciously chooses her creed over the sensual repast Comus sets out in his rhetoric. Knowing well the ramifications of Comus's canon laws, which she disputes with exquisite care, she bases her "sage/And serious doctrine of Virginitie" (*Comus* 786-87) on a well-exercised faith. This Lady is no heretic in the truth; alone in the woods, without any mediating influence to inform her initial decisions, she takes full charge and care of her own religion.

Yet, despite the extensive critical attention that has focused on the Lady's ordeal, *Comus* does not tell the tale of one trial only. In fact, from the start the story proposes the probation of all three Egerton children. As the Attendant Spirit says in his prologue, each of the Earl's offspring is required to navigate a route which

Lies through the perplex't paths of this drear  
Wood,

The nodding horror of whose shady brows  
Threats the forlorn and wand'ring Passenger.

(37-39)

Here, the "tender age" of both the boys and the girl is to "suffer peril" (40). Moreover, as a result of their isolation in the wild wood beyond the borders of the paternal domain, all three are impelled to discourse on the truth which the text sets up as supreme: chastity. Thus do they constitute themselves as separate subjectivities fit to enter their father's realm:

*Noble Lord, and Lady bright,  
I have brought ye new delight,  
Here behold so goodly grown  
Three fair branches of your own.  
Heav'n hath timely tri'd their youth,  
Their faith, their patience, and their truth,  
And sent them here through hard assays  
With a crown of deathless Praise,  
To triumph in victorious dance  
O'er sensual Folly and Intemperance.*

(968-75)

The trial of the siblings and their consequent construction as fit subjects, however, is not equal as their sex not equal seems. In particular, as we will see, the test of the Lady is to defend her truth--which the parameters of her trial specify as sufficiency to withstand sexual violation--while her brothers are tested by debating the truth of their sister. Hence, for the

brothers, the construction of self requires that they examine their sister as an object; the Lady, in contrast, must speak against the objectification of her self in order to establish her subjectivity.

Starting with the knowledge that in *Comus* both the Lady and her brothers are subject to a trial of their constitutions as true subjects, I will be concerned in the balance of this chapter with demonstrating the imposition of sexual difference onto the developing moral subject Milton posits in his puritan-individualistic ethic. Since I am focusing on the process of Milton's construction of the mediated woman, the central question that will inform my discussion of his masque may therefore be phrased thus: Is it conscionable that Milton in *Comus* casts a female who forcefully asserts her right to freedom of expression as the primary proponent of a virtue that ultimately silences her as part of a patriarchal system? The answer to this question can be neither an attack of nor an apology for the poet's own patriarchal brand of the bourgeois ethic. His construction of woman within and apart from the masculinist norm of his patriarchal culture is much too complex for such pat responses. In this masque we instead see one of those instances in Milton's *oeuvre* in which his uneasy formulations themselves foreground the gaps, fissures and inconsistencies in his ideology. The

discrepancy between a female person's participation as one of the brotherhood of Man in the broad liberal-humanist discourse of freedom, self-determination and rationality and her exclusion from this discourse as a woman who should be in silence is one such space we will explore. Another is the gap between the freedom abstinence from sexual relations offers a female in a cultural economy which reduces women to commodities in a sexual market of exchange, be it libertine or legitimate, and the personal and social limitations placed on a woman as a result of her imputed position as guardian of virtue. Ultimately, this examination will enable us to discover both the empowering and disabling prospects the contradictions in *Comus* offer to Milton's women and to women who read Milton.

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Christopher Hill in *Milton and the English Revolution* (1977) calls *Comus* "a simple fairy story" (44). As many critics have shown, the plot of this masque can be forced with some effort into a sort of Proppian scheme: brave heroes with their brandished blades rescue a beautiful maiden from the clutches of an evil villain.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, this is the sort of story of which Milton was enamored in his youth. As he explains in the autobiographical portion of his *Apology for Smectymnuus*,

I betook me among those lofty Fables and Romances, which recount in solemne canto's the deeds of Knighthood founded by our victorious Kings; & from hence had in renowne over all Christendome. There I read it in the oath of every Knight, that he should defend to the expence of his best blood, or of his life, if it so befell him, the honour and chastity of Virgin or Matron. From whence even then I learnt what a noble vertue chastity sure must be, to the defence of which so many worthies by such dear adventure of themselves had sworne....Only this my minde gave me that every free and gentle spirit without that oath ought to be borne a Knight, nor needed to expect the guilt spurre, or the laying of a sword upon his shoulder to stirre him up both by his counsell, and his arme to secure and protect the weaknesse of any attempted chastity. (CM 3, i: 304)

Milton's masque, however, is not a standard tale of helpless femininity first threatened, then saved by aggressive masculinity. Instead, the central female figure of this story is specifically required to speak for herself against her assailant, Comus. She herself summarizes this moral imperative in the prelude to her

final speech: "I hate when vice can bolt her arguments,/And virtue has no tongue to check her pride" (760-61). As we have seen, Milton's ethical scheme demands that an individual's sufficiency be tried in isolation; otherwise, it cannot stand. Hence, if she is to prove herself truly virtuous, neither her male siblings nor the masculine Attendant Spirit may intervene to protect the Lady from her temptation. To accommodate the moral trial of this female, therefore, Milton must displace the old motif of inevitable female powerlessness with a pattern which depicts a female's self-sufficiency to deflect the threat of male sexual violence.

This shift from the traditional portrayal of female passivity in the presence of male power to a new image of a woman able to stand up for herself presents several possibilities for the modern heroine. The most obvious result of this change in the mythological perception of a female's capacities is the institution in the cultural canon of a strong, capable, autonomous individual who is nevertheless a woman. This seemingly emancipatory possibility, however, is complicated immensely in Milton's masque by the framework within which it is set. Milton's Lady is indeed independent, capable and strong. But she is thus constructed so she may defend her sovereign virtue, which she alternatively labels as "the Sun-clad

power of Chastity" (782) and "the sage/And serious doctrine of Virginity" (786-87). Hence, though her "strong siding champion Conscience" (212) replaces the traditional chivalric champion as her succorer, her trial continues to be contained within customary masculinist conceptions of female sexuality. Furthermore, because she is considered to be self-sufficient, the Lady is now required to regulate not only any unsanctioned expression of her own sexuality, but also a male sexuality that is assumed by all the characters in the masque to be innately uncontrollable. Thus, though this Lady is free to speak her mind, she is to do so only in the service of a new sexual code that casts women as monitors of a supposedly unbridled male libido.<sup>9</sup>

Comus in this masque incarnates the excesses of sexuality.<sup>10</sup> Son of the profligate Bacchus and the sorceress Circe, he is "[m]uch like his Father, but his Mother more" (57). Following the lore of his mother, he herds his credulous captives into a "sensual sty" (77) wherein they lose their reason, and therefore their humanity. Comus, however, is not his mother's clone. For instance, excelling her at "her mighty Art" (83), he not only imbrutes the bodies of his victims, but also their minds.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, since Comus is a male offspring of Circe, he images a distinctly masculine sexual threat

rather than the archetypal female evil that Circe has come to represent in most readings of the classical myth. Kathleen Wall in "*A Mask Presented at Ludlow Castle: The Armor of Logos*" (1988) argues that Comus, descended from Circe and devoted to Cotytto and Hecate, propounds a "matriarchal vision" (59), but this patently is not the case in Milton's masque. Rather, in contrast to his own portrayal of the seemingly sinful seductiveness of females in *Elegy I*, Milton in this masque specifies the male as the primary spiritual, and sexual, snare to the virtuous female. Moreover, since Comus is the day-spring of the "daughter of the Sun" (line 51), he does not abrogate the law of Circe but fulfills it. His position as high priest to Cotytto and ruler of Circe's former realm therefore does less to perpetuate a matriarchal line than to institute a paradigm shift from an ideology of sexuality which sees woman as the prototypical sexual evil to one in which male sexuality is portrayed as a virtually implacable force. And in Milton's masque only a true virgin can check this violent sexual pressure.

What, then, is the effect in *Comus* of casting temptation as a male figure? To start, the Lady is required to speak against the sexual threat Comus poses to her subjectivity. That is, in order to assert her truth as a subject she needs to resist Comus's masculinist



attempt to objectify her. But first she must establish a foundation for her fight against Comus's aggressive attempts to incorporate her into his symbolic system by articulating her own code of ethics, a code that will function as a standard for her action throughout the piece. In particular, she repudiates all manifestations of "Riot and ill-manag'd Merriment" outright (172). Instead, she asserts the strength of a "virtuous mind," ever protected by its "strong siding champion Conscience" (211, 212). "[P]ure-ey'd Faith, white-handed Hope," the "unblemish't form of Chastity"--these are the images that attract the Lady's homage (213, 215). After thus enunciating her moral position, based from the beginning on faith in the inviolability of her mind, the Lady feels compelled to herald her presence through song:

I cannot hallo to my Brothers, but  
Such noise as I can make to be heard farthest  
I'll venture, for my new enliv'n'd spirits  
Prompt me; and they perhaps are not far off.

(226-29)

But instead of being delivered from the dark woods with its sinister and unintelligible noises, she is accosted by the devious and dangerous Comus, who has already resolved to use "well-plac't words of glozing courtesy" (161) to entrap the Lady in his linguistic, and literal, snares.

Like Jesus in the wilderness, the Lady here is impelled into a trial of her moral sufficiency against a satanic seducer insistent on twisting the import of her plain sense.

The temptation of Jesus by Satan in *Paradise Regained*, as Ashraf H.A. Rushdy indicates in "Of *Paradise Regained*: The Interpretation of Career" (1988), is structured as a hermeneutical struggle. According to Rushdy, the "temptations are offered to the Son, and it is in his interpretation of them that the heart of the poem resides" (254). This also, to a certain extent, is the case in Milton's masque. However, because the subject of temptation is figured as a female, against Milton's normative definition of the speaking subject as necessarily male, her temptation takes on a distinctly gender-marked character. As alluded to above, from her first encounter with the sorcerer Comus, the Lady finds she must assert her own sense of self against a masculinist attempt to define her as the Other. In particular, as the masque commences we witness Comus, who has overheard the Lady's petition to heaven, interpreting her prayer as a "Divine enchanting ravishment" (245) and imagining its source to be a siren superior to even his mother, Circe. After several amorous speculations about the nature of the unseen songstress, Comus finally

addresses her in terms that are an unequivocal expression of what he deems to be her otherness: "Hail foreign wonder"<sup>12</sup> (265). The Lady, however, refuses to be perceived as an object onto which the lustful Comus can project his desires. Her song, she curtly explains, has the purely utilitarian purpose of attracting her "sever'd company" (274); it is emphatically not a "boast of skill" (273).

To summarize this interpretative battle: Comus, in the pattern Simone de Beauvoir outlines in her Introduction to *The Second Sex* (1952), attempts ontologically to absorb the Lady into his personal subjectivity. The Lady, however, in exercising her freedom to speak to her own constitution as a subject in discourse, vocally discounts the imperialist drive of this seducer's rhetoric. She will not be defined by this male in relation to him, for she regards her conscience, mediated by divine grace only, to be her guide and standard. The contest of interpretation that is enacted between Comus and the Lady, then, does not only, as in *Paradise Regained*, hinge on the interpretation of an articulated text within its total context, but additionally depends on a speaking female subject's resistance to colonization by a dominating masculinist discourse.

But it is not only the villain, Comus, who attempts to place the Lady in a symbolic system that negates her verbalized sense of self, for her brothers also attempt to load her with obligatory connotations that conflict with her definitions of her being. Indulging in what is ostensibly a scholastic exercise, these Brothers assume opposite sides in a debate over their sister's ability to withstand temptation. The Elder Brother, casting himself as the Lady's champion, seems to reinforce her initial argument with his own. However, as we will see, this apparent similitude between the Lady's ethical code and her elder brother's variation on it is far more inimical to her project of self-determination than the Second Brother's protestations that she cannot, by her very nature, be sufficient. The test of the two brothers nevertheless shares this fundamental similarity: their own sufficiency is based on their ability to put forward the most forcefully convincing account of their sister's truth, which they both equate with her physical chastity.

The Second Brother, who explicitly places a higher value on a woman's outside than on her inherent humanity and rationality, maintains that his sister, whom he assumes is helpless without a male guide (350, 582-83), will descend inevitably into "wild amazement and affright" (356) and consequently fall victim to "Savage hunger" and

"Savage heat" (358). Since he is unsure of his sister's moral constitution as a female, the syntax he employs to phrase this speculation leaves unclear whether this girl will be overcome by her own savage desires or by the savagery of another ("What if in wild amazement and affright,/Or while we speak, within the direful grasp/Of Savage hunger or of Savage heat?" [356-58]). We sense, however, that the distinction between the guilt belonging to the perpetrator of a sexual assault and the guilt imputed onto the victim of such an assault would be lost on this brother. Beauty, he asserts, enacts its own blame; it,

...like the fair Hesperian Tree  
 Laden with blooming gold, had need the guard  
 Of dragon watch with unenchanted eye,  
 To save her blossoms and defend her fruit  
 From the rash hand of bold Incontinence.

(392-97)

Here again, the Second Brother's language leaves uncertain exactly whose bold incontinence the Lady must protect herself against: her own or her attacker's. And, again, the distinction does not seem to bear on his argument. To be virtuous, he implies, a female must be walled off. His claims are indeed a far cry from Milton's denunciation in *Areopagitica* of a "fugitive and cloister'd vertue" (CM 4:

311). Nonetheless, because this brother believes external beauty to be the basis of female worth, he pessimistically maintains that his sister's "strong siding champion Conscience" (212) will not suffice to protect her against any depreciation of her commodity value.

The Elder Brother, in apparent contrast, seems to support the Lady's stated conviction that, though she is alone in the woods, she is neither too weak nor too unweeting to recognize and resist temptation. Against the Second Brother's fears of the savage sexuality that lurks in the woods, or in the Lady, the Elder Brother boldly asserts that

I do not think my sister so to seek,  
Or so unprincipl'd in virtue's book  
And the sweet peace that goodness bosoms ever.

(366-68)

Yet, in spite of his staunch advocacy of his sister here, the Elder Brother with this statement does nothing to dispel the Second Brother's notion that the female sex, when uncontained by socially sanctioned chaperones, is not safe in and of itself. The danger to the Lady, even in the Elder Brother's mind, still inheres as much in unprincipled female sexuality as it does in the possibility of male sexual violence. Thus constituting the Lady's virtue as a physical quality, in direct

contrast to the Lady's own specification of her virtue as a quality of mind and conscience, he assumes the proof of her virtue to be her physically untouched condition. He imagines that, if she is truly pure, she naturally will assume an impenetrable coat of armor that will enable her to walk with utter impunity through those dangerous stretches which lie beyond the bounds of civilized intercourse:

Yea there, where very desolation dwells,  
 By grots and caverns shagg'd with horrid shades,  
 She may pass on with unblench't majesty,  
 Be it not done in pride or in presumption.

(428-31)

Nothing, the Elder Brother claims, "[h]ath hurtful power o'er true virginity" (437). Such "noble grace," *if* truly noble and *if* truly gracious, automatically will deflect "brute violence" (451).

The Lady, however, has been cognizant from the beginning of her ordeal of the very real threat to her "life and honor" (220). Still, such knowledge does not affect her unfailing sense of her self as a virtuous being, since she believes her virtue to exist beyond any insult which could be inflicted on her body. Her elder brother's claim that a female who is truly virtuous can never be hurt nor enthralled accordingly undermines the

Lady's initial proposition that her purity depends on the steadfastness of her spirit only. This claim, moreover, sounds suspiciously like the Second Brother's implicit belief that a woman who is assaulted could not have been virtuous. Arguing from diametrical positions, the two brothers thus attempt to encircle the Lady in precisely that binary opposition--either angel or whore--from which she seeks to break free. In equivalent moves, one brother reduces a female's worth to her outward beauty, while the other brother lowers female virtue to the physical condition of virginity.

Reverberations of both brothers' arguments may be heard in Comus's extended verbal attack on the Lady. Repeating the moral position she posited at the beginning of the masque, at the start of the temptation scene in the castle the Lady immediately asserts the inviolability of her spirit against the threat of physical violence:

Thou canst not touch the freedom of my mind  
 With all thy charms, although this corporal  
                   rind,  
 Thou hast immanacl'd.

(663-65)

As she recognizes, her body may be enthralled, and even hurt, but her conscience, and therefore her constitution as an independent moral being, remains in her power alone.



Comus, of course, grants no credence to the Lady's words. Like her brothers, but lacking their overtly benevolent intentions, he reduces the Lady's worth to her outward beauty, her vaunted chastity to mere virginity. "Beauty is nature's coin," he declares, and "must not be hoarded,/But must be current" (739-40). He obviously shares with the Second Brother the belief that a woman is valuable only as long as she appears attractive to men. The two differ only in their varying applications of this doctrine: while the brother's interest is in hoarding such a "Miser's treasure" (399), the outlaw Comus desires to spend such coin profligately.

The commodification of the female in this instance would be complete but for one impediment: the object speaks.<sup>13</sup> Abjuring the sort of complicitous mutism required to uphold Comus's autistic world view, the Lady commences her defense of her self by shattering the seeming impermeability of his solipsistic libertinism with the sound of her voice:

I had not thought to have unlockt my lips  
 In this unhallow'd air, but that this Juggler  
 Would think to charm my judgement, as mine eyes,  
 Obtruding false rules prankt in reason's garb.  
 (756-59)

Asserting her autonomy as a speaking subject, she subsequently debunks the sort of commerce that markets women as objects made for male use:

If every just man that now pines with want  
 Had but a moderate and beseeming share  
 Of that which lewdly-pamper'd Luxury  
 Now heaps upon some few with vast excess,  
 Nature's full blessings would be well dispens't  
 In unsuperfluous even proportion,  
 And she no whit encumber'd with her store,  
 And then the giver would be better thank't,  
 His praise due paid.<sup>14</sup>

(768-76)

She stops short, however, of re-educating Comus into her knowledge of "the Sun-clad power of Chastity" (782). Could it be that, since Comus obdurately refuses to see females as anything other than goods that "must be shown/In courts, at feasts, and high solemnities/Where most may wonder at the workmanship" (745-47), he would inevitably conflate the metaphysical virtue of chastity, premised according to the Lady on inviolability of spirit, with the intact state of a virgin female's hymen? Like the hard of heart from whom Christ veils the mysteries of his mission "because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand" (Math. 13: 13),

would Comus subsume the spirit of chastity under the literal sign of virginity? The Lady, who echoes Christ's words, thinks so:

Thou hast nor Ear nor Soul to apprehend  
 The sublime notion and high mystery  
 That must be utter'd to unfold the sage  
 And serious doctrine of Virginity.

(784-87)

Her interpretation of her moral sufficiency at this point nevertheless stands. Neither her male siblings, nor her male seducer, have been able to topple this vociferous lady from her high conception of what constitutes her virtue.

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The power of true chastity: this is the rationale upon which the Lady bases her right to speak and act as an independent moral agent. Whether the Lady means virginity to figure chastity in the highest metaphysical sense or chastity to equal virginity in the purely physical sense, however, has been a constant source of contention among critics of the Ludlow masque. According to critics such as Malcolm Ross, the "spinster-like" Lady reduces "the highest supernatural grace to a secondary practical virtue"<sup>15</sup> (200, 196). At the opposite end of this debate, critics such as Arthur E. Barker insist that the virgin

Lady epitomizes the "typically humanistic doctrine of ascent from and through nature to grace" (9). I contend, however, that in the masque chastity and virginity are constantly conflated and then reconstituted as distinct terms, and that Milton is not in control of the excesses of meaning that accrue from his uncertainty over the equation of chastity and virginity. To demonstrate the overdetermined effects of chastity as a virtue in this masque, I must now turn to what Leah S. Marcus has identified as its "local readings": those which look at "the immediate political and social circumstances surrounding its performance" (67). Following this examination of *Comus* as a performative piece responding to a specific series of historical situations, I will move to an analysis of the mythical subtext of male violence against females and female solidarity against male violence that underlies the story of the Lady's trial. Having done this, I will tackle the issue that is finally the most troubling in the text: the absolute silencing of the Lady immediately after she makes her inordinately high claims for the power of her word.

*Comus* clearly is about an attempted rape, however metonymically this assault is presented. More than this, though, *Comus* is about the test of a rape victim's veracity and virtue against a cultural code which insists

on blaming the victim for the egregious insult perpetrated on her body against her will. The brothers, as we have seen, both base their perception of their chaste sister's truth on her physical condition. If she remains a virgin, she is truly chaste: this is the pivotal point upon which their argument balances. Milton's Lady, however, upsets the equilibrium of this dichotomous paradigm by moving beyond the binary opposition that sets virgin against whore. According to her, a woman's mind may remain free despite the immurement of her physical being. The profoundly feminist understanding that the violation of a woman's body by another does not constitute her sin is the logical corollary of this proposition.<sup>16</sup>

For what purpose does Milton, "English literature's paradigmatic patriarch" (Nyquist, "Genesis," 101), effect this radical breach of received masculinist tradition? As previously stated, to tackle this question we must first look at what the text is speaking to. In an influential piece of scholarly work, "*Comus* and the Castlehaven Scandal" (1971), Barbara Breasted proposed that Milton's 1634 edition of the *Mask Presented at Ludlow Castle* be placed in the context of the Castlehaven sex scandal, an incident replete with multiple scenes of forced sex.<sup>17</sup> Though Breasted's conclusion--that the Lady refuses *Comus*'s sexual offers "because she knows so little about

the pleasures described in them" (203; see 208)--is extremely conservative, the historical evidence she presents indicates that the customary procedure of blaming the victim of a sexual assault was challenged fundamentally by the circumstances of this case. Though in the standard sexist parlance of the times, the young stepdaughter of the Earl of Castlehaven, Elizabeth Audley, purportedly was "made a whore" as a result of the repeated sexual assaults inflicted on her by her stepfather and his manservants, the fact that as a young, powerless dependent of the Earl she was particularly susceptible to his threats--a fact which King Charles I recognized in his pardon of her--casts into doubt the conventional condemnation as a whore of a female forcibly made a non-virgin outside marriage (219, 217).

Leah Marcus explicitly takes up this theme with her reading of *Comus* in the context of another contemporary sex scandal: the rape of the serving girl Margery Evans by Philbert Burghill, a powerful local magnate, and the subsequent abortion of justice in her case. Briefly put, Margery Evans, who boldly spoke against the man who assaulted her body, found herself incarcerated for her words, her vocal charges violently suppressed by the local judiciary. That is, her testimony to the truth of the assault by Burghill was constituted by the regional

authorities as her crime. Moreover, in the eyes of these men the forced breach of her physical virginity utterly compromised her own truth as a maiden (79). Like the Lady's brothers, they assumed that if a woman is raped, she must have deserved it.

The paralleling of the predicament of the physically powerless but spiritually pure Lady in Milton's masque with that of Margery Evans, as Marcus points out, consequently has the effect of opening up "the whole question of volition in cases of physical compulsion" (78). Chastity and virginity cannot be considered inseparable if justice is to accrue to a rape victim such as was Margery Evans, such as could have been the Lady in Milton's *Comus*. The Lady, who "has assumed the position of one of the powerless" in the masque, accordingly becomes the voice of those who, like Margery Evans, are oppressed by the stereotypical view of rape victims as inherently guilty for the crime committed against them (Marcus 79). Hence, as Marcus notes, whatever Milton intended in *Comus*, what he actually produced was "a work that displays a rare, unsettling capacity to dismantle the traditional discourse of authority" (81). On one level at least, Milton's conception of chastity in this masque thus has the effect of liberating women from masculinist norms

and constituting them as social subjects entitled to speak with the authority of truth.

The text of Milton's Ludlow masque, as Breasted and Marcus so thoroughly document, speaks to issues of culpability, agency, and justice--all of which are variously determined by the value placed by a patriarchal culture on the truth of the female social subject's testimony. But what is said in the subtext of this masque? And does this allusive undercurrent subvert or support the radical proposition that Milton's Lady puts forward when she asserts that her truth as a chaste woman is separate from any injury which may be inflicted on her body? We have already explored the substitution of the male Comus for the Circean female as the exemplar of excessive sexuality, concluding that this shift from temptress to tempter binds women to the role of sexual monitor even as it frees them from their imputed position as man's sexual evil. This sort of double-edged complexity is also evident in the several mythological allusions in the Lady's song (lines 230-43). The example of Echo as a speaking woman, for instance, acts as an inspiration for the Lady's own projection of her voice. Echo, praised by the Lady as "Sweet Queen of Parley" (241), nevertheless speaks in a mode that has been rendered hopelessly reiterative by the self-reflexive



discourse of a male's desire. The Lady, we know, struggles against Comus's attempts to incorporate her as an object into his own symbolic system. But her brothers also try to enclose her truth within their patriarchal norms. And, though she successfully counters Comus's colonizing effort, the fact that she loses her voice immediately upon the entrance of her brothers into the scene of her temptation and that she silently listens to the Attendant Spirit's paean to marriage once she is installed in her father's demesne suggests that her radical conception of chastity as an empowering tool for women asserting their autonomy from masculinist economies of desire ultimately has been retrieved for a patriarchal marriage market which considers the virtue of physical virginity alone to be supremely valuable.<sup>18</sup>

In her song the Lady alludes to yet another woman whose speech was stymied by the imperatives of a violent male's passion. Thomas O. Calhoun quite plausibly suggests that the nightingale first referred to by the Lady in her song (line 234) and later used by the Attendant Spirit as an appellation for the Lady herself (566) represents Philomela, a woman whose tongue was ripped out by her rapist so she could never reveal his crime.<sup>19</sup> Philomela and her sister, of course, elude the constraints of masculinist discourse by weaving tapestries

which only they can read, and so arrange to get their revenge. But the fact remains that the amputation of Philomela's tongue by Tereus limits her communicative power to arcane texts legible only to the initiate. Her subversive strategy consequently seems less a victory than a compensation. The Lady's oblique reference to Philomela the nightingale, which is later reinforced by the Attendant Spirit's apostrophe to the Lady, thus bodes ominous possibilities for her project as a speaking subject.

The list of allusions to female oppression at the most violent sexual level goes on and on in the masque. Informing the entire debate between the brothers, for example, is the early allusion to Callisto, an acolyte of Diana who was raped by Jove and subsequently transformed by him into the "Tyrian Cynosure" (342), or *Ursa Minor*. Beset by circumstances similar to the Lady's, Callisto's body ultimately is imprisoned, though "her mind remained unchanged" (Ovid 63). Yet, because she is trapped by the traditional equation of chastity with virginity, she is forced to carry the entire burden of guilt and blame for Jove's assault on her. Daphne, whose fate Comus alludes to as he begins his final verbal attack on the Lady (659-62), is another nymph caught in that classic double-bind: "her very loveliness prevented her from being what she

desired, and her beauty defeated her own wishes" (Ovid 42). Fleeing Apollo's grasp only to be restrained in the form of a tree, she is ultimately bound by this male's desire in essentially the same manner the Lady will be. Lastly, Sabrina, the succorer of virgins "such as was herself,/In hard-besetting need" (856-57), also acts simultaneously as a source of female solidarity against male sexual violence and as an emblem of the penalties of living as a female in a male ruled world. Specifically, though she and her community of nymphs provide help and a safe haven for "ensnared chastity" (909), the particular condition of their sororal retreat has been determined already by a masculinist social system which generally demands that females either submit to a world governed by males' desire or abandon the world utterly.

Thus, while all these instances of attempted or achieved rape and ultimate escape undoubtedly establish a positive "series of female figures [who] silently take it for granted that they have a responsibility towards each other" (Belsey, *Milton*, 52-53), they also serve to reinforce the attitude that it is the female's responsibility to defuse or dodge the supposedly implacable sexual energy of the male. Hence, though a company of chaste nymphs in a woman-identified context may operate as a supportive community of self-determining

females, in a bourgeois patriarchal culture it alternatively may become a disciplinary body which supervises the construction of the modern subject by acting as society's moral arbiters. The destiny of such nymphs in a bourgeois-masculinist social system, in other words, is to become angels in the house. Reincorporated into a patriarchal system of values and norms that regards a maiden's trials against sexual temptation to be fit preparation for her career as a pure wife, chastity in this context thus loses its radical potential to cast women as self-determining beings true to their own consciences. Instead, it trains them to enter first their father's and then their husband's house with due submission and decorous silence.

Significantly, her father's house is exactly where the Lady ultimately goes. Under his tutelage, moreover, she is eventually to enter the sexual relationship that the paternal Attendant Spirit sanctions in his final song: monogamous marriage led by the man. And the Lady, whose ability to speak was stifled upon her brothers' violent intervention into her trial, can say nothing about this manipulation of her fate. How, then, do we evaluate her final assertion that the power of her word is such that it could defeat the sorcerer Comus when the force of her brothers' blades cannot?

Yet should I try, the uncontrolled worth  
 Of this pure cause would kindle my rapt spirits  
 To such a flame of sacred vehemence,  
 That dumb things would be mov'd to sympathize,  
 And the brute Earth would lend her nerves, and  
     shake,  
 Till all thy magic structures rear'd so high,  
 Were shatter'd into heaps o'er thy false head.  
 (793-99)

Even Comus recognizes the potential force of the Lady's speech:

She fables not, I feel that I do fear  
 Her words set off by some superior power.  
 (800-1; cf. 611-15)

Yet, as we know, her potent words, which have saved her thus far from Comus's threat to her articulated sense of self, are insufficient to prevent the suppression of her speech once she enters her Father's castle.

Here we have what seems to be a discrepancy between the Lady's vocal resistance against the dictates of libertinism while in Comus's castle and her silent submission to the decrees of patriarchy while in her Father's. This discrepancy nevertheless loses its incoherence when set within the formal framework of the masque. The masque begins with a celebration of the

Father's rule over his domain and domicile (17-36). It ends by reaffirming the sovereign power of the Father in both his residence and his realm (938-56). Bracketed between these two assertions of patriarchal power is the drama of the Lady's trial as a speaking subject. Moreover, her trial is ever under the governing gaze of her father, who watches from his place of privilege in the audience. Mediated by her father's omnipresent eye, the Lady's subject positions are thus invariably seen to serve the interests of paternal rule. The Lady is approved of when she vocally resists Comus's unlawful attempt to absorb her into his being. But she is equally approved of when she submits without protest to the promise of a socially sanctioned patriarchal marriage. And this model of marriage, shaped by the principle of *femme couverte*, will lead just as certainly as Comus's proposed coupling to the absorption of the Lady's social self into that of a male's. Hence, the Lady's radical sense of herself as a speaking subject, like her radical concept of chastity, ultimately has been co-opted by the institutional demands of patriarchal rule. Yet a discrepancy still remains between the contradictory requirements of a bourgeois-patriarchal system for individual autonomy on the one hand and female subordination on the other. And this tension

is not eased entirely by the reassertion of patriarchal norms in the end.

Clearly, a "true Virgin" (line 905) speaking to the constitution of the "virgin Truth" (Areo CM 4: 338) has limited currency in the patriarchal social system explicitly celebrated at both the beginning and the end of the masque. As a member of the brotherhood of Man, the Lady must boldly assert her freedom to speak her conscience, but as a female in a system that nominates man as the generic signifier she must modestly hold her peace. The requirement of the Lady as a bourgeois social subject to establish a single and coherent self consequently functions to foreground the disjunction between these conflicting demands. And this disjunction ultimately opens up the patriarchal ideology with which Milton overlays his puritan-individualist ethic. The Lady, who is "unique in Milton's canon in being a female who could potentially call upon the higher power that so frightens Comus" (Quilligan 210), accordingly presages the uneasily mediated woman Milton will construct in his great humanist epic, *Paradise Lost*.

### Chapter 3

#### The End of Man (and Woman):

##### Gender Difference and Destiny in *Paradise Lost*

*Paradise Lost* is a poem of possibilities. The reasonable creatures of Milton's God always have a choice; the exigencies of Milton's Arminianism demands that this be so.<sup>1</sup> Eve, for example, possesses the freedom to refuse the Serpent's offer right up until the moment of her fall. Diane Kelsey McColley, who contests the traditional ecclesiastical view of Eve as the one fatal flaw in God's creation, convincingly argues this point in *Milton's Eve* (1983), where she states,

If Milton was to "assert Eternal Providence" he had now to do something that was indeed "unattempted yet in Prose or Rhime": he had to explain the separation in a way that manifests Eve's sufficiency to stand. His radical solution was to represent Eve's departure as the result of a responsible and considered choice whose outcome may have been, though it was not, the greater good of an unfallen race. (140-41)

Nor was Adam, as C.S. Lewis suggests, impelled to accept the interdicted apple from his wife: the option of chastising the errant Eve instead of complying with her folly was always there (127). Even Satan is continually



offered the choice between rebellion and repentance. At the foot of the stairway to heaven (PL 3: 501-25), upon his first sight of Eden (PL 4: 23-30) and in the presence of the awe-inspiring Eve (PL 9: 455-70), for instance, he wavers between elevating hope and damning despair. Indeed, in order for Milton's assertion of God's high providence to hold, the Devil himself must explicitly seal his doom by repeatedly refusing such opportunities for reconciliation with his Maker.<sup>2</sup>

For those who willingly choose to follow God's commands, the eschatological momentum of Milton's cosmos further promises the possibility of a relational structure amongst God's rational creatures which is freed from hierarchical difference. Because in Milton's view perfection consists of a progressive movement toward the central divine presence rather than a static state of completion on a rigid chain of being, all centripetally moving humans and angels eventually should become equal in God. Milton's God looks forward to the day when the Son shall lay aside the tokens of kingly office, "for regal Sceptre then no more shall need" because "God shall be All in All" (PL 3: 340; 341). The Son, image of God in everything, later reflects this hope back to his Father:

Sceptre and Power, thy giving, I assume,  
And gladlier shall resign, when in the end

Thou shalt be All in All, and I in thee  
 For ever, and in mee all whom thou lov'st.<sup>3</sup>

(PL 6: 730-33)

This union of God's creatures in their Creator accordingly will spell the end of all political chains of command in God's creation, the end of all those "Thrones, Princedoms, Powers, [and] Dominions" (PL 3: 320) that figure so prominently in the state of Milton's universe as it stands in *Paradise Lost*. Not surprisingly, it is precisely this egalitarian end which Satan, stuck in his self-centered notions of absolute rule, assiduously resists. Since primacy is paramount with him, his goal is always to erect himself as monarch--a position which he maintains is his immutable inheritance.<sup>4</sup>

This prospective elimination of class difference throughout God's entire kingdom is anticipated by the absence of sexual difference in heaven. Among the angels, who "when they please/Can either Sex assume, or both" (PL 1: 423-24), amorphous sexual potential rather than hierarchical sexual division is the rule. Furthermore, because in this place there is no system of oppression whereby one gender asserts its inborn right to stay on top of the other, sexual expression among its inhabitants consists of a completely satisfying union of "Pure with Pure/Desiring" (PL 8: 827-28). Obviously, this vision of

sexual plurality not only within a society, but within each social subject, has exceedingly radical sexual-political implications.<sup>5</sup> As Catherine Belsey perceives,

in Milton's heaven there are no gender stereotypes, no antithetical voices, masculine and feminine, no opposition affirmed as privilege. There can be, in consequence, no sexual rule and no submission, no authority grounded in anatomy.

(*Milton* 67)

Succinctly put, in Milton's heaven merit, not morphology, constitutes the fundamental measure of worth.

On the earth Milton depicts in *Paradise Lost*, however, anatomy is destiny. Following the logic with which he read Genesis 1: 26-27 in *Tetrachordon*,<sup>6</sup> Milton here begins his description of humanity by detailing the qualities of the genus Man:

Two of far nobler shape erect and tall,  
Godlike erect, with native Honor clad  
In naked Majesty seem'd Lords of all,  
And worthy seem'd, for in thir looks Divine  
The image of thir glorious Maker shone,  
Truth, Wisdom, Sanctitude severe and pure,  
Severe, but in true filial freedom plac't;

Whence true authority in men.

(PL 4: 288-95)

Yet, this suggestion of the equal nobility, honor, majesty, worth and authority of all the members of the human race he quickly qualifies, for he believes that the first humans are "[n]ot equal, as thir sex not equal seem'd" (296). Hierarchy in Milton's epic poem, in other words, hinges on the physical markers of gender:

For contemplation hee and valor form'd,  
 For softness shee and sweet attractive Grace,  
 Hee for God only, shee for God in him:  
 His fair large Front and Eye sublime declar'd  
 Absolute rule; and Hyacinthine Locks  
 Round from his parted forelock manly hung  
 Clust'ring, but not beneath his shoulders broad:  
 Shee as a veil down to the slender waist  
 Her unadorned golden tresses wore  
 Dishevell'd, but in wanton ringlets wav'd  
 As the Vine curls her tendrils, which impli'd  
 Subjection.

(PL 4: 297-308)

Made for and from man, Milton's woman is thus placed at a second remove from her heavenly Maker. Her difference, moreover, is not one of degree merely, but of essence. In the mouth of the first human male, this perception of the

female as a distinct species inherently inferior to men consequently becomes the justification for his continuing dominance over her:

For well I understand in the prime end  
Of Nature her th' inferior, in the mind  
And inward Faculties, which most excel,  
In outward also her resembling less  
His Image who made both, and less expressing  
The character of that Dominion giv'n  
O'er other Creatures.

(PL 8: 540-546)

Even in an unfallen world, it seems, Milton cannot imagine a human society truly based on equality.

In his prose, as I pointed out in Chapter One, Milton also attempts to establish a difference in essence between female and male human beings so that he may argue the case for the continuance of male supremacist rule in the new English commonwealth, thought by Milton and other seventeenth-century millenarians to be the beginning of God's kingdom on earth.<sup>7</sup> In the *Christian Doctrine*, for instance, he purposefully debars women from participation in the state of the church and directs them to seek their spiritual instruction at home from their husbands even as he proposes the elimination of sacerdotal mediators and the subsequent broadening of the faith community to

include "the weakest among the brethren" (CM 16: 325). His *Paradise Lost* from its first description of the human race similarly promotes this systematic exclusion of the prototypical woman from full participation in all the activities of the human community: civil rule, intellectual activity, spiritual inquiry. But to justify completely God's ways to Man, meaning female and male, Milton must create a woman able to stand on her own. Hence, if humankind's end is not to be predetermined, woman also must be a wholly rational being capable of conscious and free choice. And herein lies the fundamental inconsistency in Milton's construction of the first female individual: like man she must be fully rational and fully free, yet as a woman she also must accede fully to man's behests, and she must do so because she is less endowed than he with human rationality. How, then, does the specific end for which woman in *Paradise Lost* was formed accord with the end for which Man in the generic sense was made? Moreover, what sort of gendered man must Milton make in order to secure male supremacist rule in his Paradise? These are the questions that I will take up in the rest of this chapter, again always looking for the consequences of gender construction for Milton's increasingly mediated woman.

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In the beginning, Milton has his God create Man: "the Master work, the end/Of all yet done" (PL 7: 505-06). Following the polyvalent interpretative strategy which he employs throughout *Paradise Lost*, he presents this momentous event from at least three different perspectives: Eve's (PL 4: 449-91), Raphael's (PL 7: 505-34), and Adam's (PL 8: 250-520). However, it is Raphael's version, sanctioned by the Creator himself, that carries the authority of orthodoxy in this text. In conversation with Adam, who is accompanied by his quietly attentive "consorted *Eve*" (PL 7: 50), Raphael begins by summarizing the character of this creature called Man:

...a Creature who not prone  
 And Brute as other Creatures, but endu'd  
 With Sanctity of Reason, might erect  
 His Stature, and upright with Front serene  
 Govern the rest, self-knowing, and from thence  
 Magnanimous to correspond with Heav'n,  
 But grateful to acknowledge whence his good  
 Descends, thither with heart and voice and eyes  
 Directed in Devotion, to adore  
 And worship God Supreme who made him chief  
 Of all his works.  
 (PL 7: 506-16)

This, then, is the end of Man: to know and to worship God. As Adam affirmed earlier, God's "sovrane will" alone is "the end/Of what we are" (PL 7: 79-80).

It is nevertheless unclear whether Adam is using the royal 'we' in this instance or whether he is speaking on behalf of both himself and Eve. Milton, to save his readers from falling into what he considers to be the latter error of assigning Man's privileges to both female and male human beings,<sup>9</sup> consequently has his affable angel conflate the two biblical creation stories into a single tale which establishes the male's creation as Man:

Let us make now Man in our image, Man  
In our similitude, and let *them* rule [my  
italics]

Over the Fish and Fowl of Sea and Air,  
And every creeping thing that creeps the ground.  
This said, he form'd thee, *Adam*, thee O Man.  
(PL 7: 519-24)

Continuing his exposition, Raphael makes it blatantly clear to his listeners--Adam, Eve, and us--that the man, Adam, was made in the express image of God, while man's consort, the woman Eve, was made incidentally "for Race" (530). To make his point that Man means male, this angel exceeds even those laws which Milton previously laid down for married women in *The Doctrine and Discipline of*



*Divorce.* That is, with his passing reference to woman's end, Raphael does not at all emphasize, as Milton does in this divorce tract, her obligation to refresh her hardworking husband with fit conversation; instead, he asserts that woman's primary function is to facilitate the conversion of this one Adam into many.

The exclusion of Eve from the full estate of Man is further reinforced on this occasion by Raphael's several chummy asides to Adam. For instance, speaking with Adam "as friend with friend" (PL 5: 229), Raphael cuts short his discourse on the nature of the beasts with a casually familiar remark which he addresses to Adam alone:

...the rest are numberless,

And thou thir Natures know'st, and gav'st them  
Names,

Needless to thee repeated.

(PL 7: 492-94)

Milton's Eve, limited to an innate knowledge of things vegetable only, may well have benefited from a fuller explanation of the names and natures of the animals. Her specific lesson, however, is that she is to stay within the bounds of knowledge set for females by a masculinist *episteme*. To reaffirm this implicit lesson, Raphael once again establishes an exclusive rapport with Adam when in the midst of his account of the creation of Man he

confidentially says to him, "as thou know'st" (536). Raphael here makes it blatantly clear that he and Adam together stand in a privileged position with respect to Eve, who cannot share such first-hand knowledge. Finally buttressing this position, Raphael explicitly addresses yet another parenthetical statement to Adam, and so implicitly excludes Eve from the conversation: "thou remember'st, for thou heard'st" (561). Without question, the cumulative effect of these three asides is to establish a bond between the masculine angel and the man Adam which bars the first female from full entry into that knowledge of self and God which in Milton's cosmos constitutes the crown of human wisdom.

Ironically, immediately prior to his deployment of these exclusionary tactics Raphael talks approvingly of the "Parsimonious Emmet" (PL 7: 485), who symbolizes the hope of a "[p]attern of just equality perhaps/Hereafter, join'd in her popular Tribes/Of Commonalty" (487-89). In an additional inconsistency, throughout most of his creation story this rigorously masculinist angel emphasizes the notion that division need not imply hierarchy. Creation, as Raphael's image of the Son with the "golden Compasses" demonstrates, necessarily proceeds by circumscription (225). Heaven is divided from earth, light from darkness, day from night, the firmament from

the waters, the waters from dry land--and all this is good. And since it is good, God's Son specifically does not establish these dichotomies on an evaluative principle for, as he knows, "fierce extremes" serve only to undermine the essential integrity of God's creation (272).

Yet, as the process of creation becomes ever more refined a qualitative difference between related entities seems to emerge:

And God made two great Lights, great for thir  
use

To Man, the greater to have rule by Day,  
The less by Night altern.

(PL 7: 346-48)

This bias, moreover, is explicitly linked to a gender difference hitherto absent from such mutual pairings as water and land, sky and water, day and night, light and dark, heaven and earth. Light is now not only divided into male and female, but the male light is made superior to the female light:

...less bright the Moon,  
But opposite in levell'd West was set  
His mirror, with full face borrowing her Light  
From him, for other light she needed none  
In that aspect.

(PL 7: 375-79)

It is possible that Milton might be using this description to test his readers' fallen propensity to value the prestige of the masculine Sun over the feminine Moon. Correcting this tendency in Adam, Raphael will later explain that "Great/Or Bright infers not Excellence" (PL 8: 90-91). And, in the arch-angel's opinion, it is Mother Earth who in fact ranks higher than the Sun in ultimate worth. However, in Book VII this suggestion of difference without distinction is immediately replaced by the unequivocal assertion of hierarchy in the gendered human community. Thus is the possibility of a democratic cosmos based on heterogeneity suppressed by a series of Aristotelian binary oppositions that always places that entity marked masculine on top.

Milton's Adam, the prototypical masculinist man, has no problem with such a system. His story, which follows Raphael's structurally and chronologically, accordingly functions to reflect and intensify the doctrine of male supremacy that the angel introduced in his account of humankind's inception. But before Adam relates his story his wife provides a "concrete example" of that brand of "female decorum" which Milton prescribes for women in his *Christian Doctrine* (Kelley 181). Eve, who retires to her domestic sphere when she perceives the conversation between the angel and Adam to be entering a higher plane,

has learned her lesson well. And though Milton must establish that she went "as not with such discourse/Delighted, or not capable her ear/Of what was high" (PL 8: 48-50) so his God cannot be accused of making this creature insufficient to withstand temptation, he nevertheless reduces her intellectual and theological education to a sort of sexual foreplay:

Her Husband the Relater she preferr'd  
 Before the Angel, and of him to ask  
 Chose rather: hee, she knew, would intermix  
 Grateful digressions, and solve high dispute  
 With conjugal Caresses, from his Lip  
 Not Words alone pleas'd her.

(PL 8: 52-57)

Clearly, though males will benefit from "frequent intercourse" of the intellectual kind with their Maker (PL 7: 571), females must have sexual intercourse with men in order to obtain knowledge of God.

Adam, fully cognizant of his dignity as Man, quite naturally--or is that culturally?--characterizes himself as erect (PL 8: 259-61), inherently wise (271-73, 354-55), and lordly (319, 339). His single flaw, however, is that he is alone, and he feels this flaw keenly:

...but with mee

I see not who partakes. In solitude

What happiness, who can enjoy alone,  
 Or all enjoying, what contentment find?  
 (PL 8: 363-66)

God, who intended all along to provide Adam with a human mate, nevertheless deems it expedient to try this man to determine his awareness of the fundamental qualities required for the construction of a harmonious human community. Adam, who initially requests a fellow "fit to participate/All rational delight" (PL 8: 390-91), immediately wins God's approbation. He rightly recognizes that he can never find companionship among unequals (364-84). "Collateral love, and dearest amity" (426), which alone will provide the human individual with truly meet society, he knows cannot accord with ontological ranks. Why, then, after all this talk of fellowship and equality, does Milton's God simply offer Adam "[t]hy likeness, thy fit help, *thy other self*,/Thy wish, exactly to thy heart's desire" (450-51; my italics)? Is it the entry of the male's desire into this equation which inevitably spawns a secondary self instead of a complete equal, a supplementary Other rather than another human being? Certainly, this is the case with Sin, who issued out of the left side of Satan's head as a by-product of his solipsistic passion (PL 2: 747-58).

In contrast to the horrifying emanation born out of Satan's self-love, however, the woman God makes out of Adam's heady desire is lovely, sweet, and fit for all "amorous delight" (PL 8: 477). But does this woman answer Adam's original need for a fully rational companion? Marshall Grossman in his essay "Servile/Sterile/Style: Milton and the Question of Woman" (1988) offers the interesting thesis that the entry of Adam as a subject into the symbolic economy of Milton's Eden requires the simultaneous subjection of Eve.<sup>9</sup> Is this then the case? Does Adam's perception of himself in Eve, who in his eyes is "[m]anlike, but different" (PL 8: 471), necessitate her objectification? Like Comus, is Milton's Adam a colonist who seeks to shore up his own subjectivity by absorbing the female's being into his definition of himself as Man? And Milton: to meet the exigencies of male supremacism must he substitute for the concept of a unified human race born out of one body a paradigm of power posited on specific features of certain individuals' bodies (cf. PL 7: 155)?

To hear Adam tell the story, one would believe that Eve indeed exists only to feed his desire. Interpreting his first encounter with her for the angel, he remarks:

She heard me thus, and though divinely brought,  
Yet Innocence and Virgin Modesty,

Her virtue and the conscience of her worth,  
 That would be woo'd, and not unsought be won,  
 Not obvious, not obtrusive, but retir'd,  
 The more desirable, or to say all,  
 Nature herself, though pure of sinful thought,  
 Wrought in her so, that seeing me, she turn'd;  
 I follow'd her, she what was Honor knew,  
 And with obsequious Majesty approv'd  
 My pleaded reason.

(PL 8: 500-10)

This is precisely the sort of imputation of a male's desire onto a female's actions which impelled Mary Wollstonecraft to condemn Milton as a sensualist who "only bends to the indefeasible right of beauty"<sup>10</sup> (*VinWmn* 20). Moreover, it is exactly this sort of masculinist interpretation of a woman's motives against which the Lady in Milton's Ludlow masque must argue in order to secure her right to speak as an independent subject. Eve, however, is not granted a voice in this colloquy over her nature. Her story, told prior to the angel's and Adam's, nevertheless functions to modify our response to Adam's tale.

As readers who share the omniscient perspective of *Paradise Lost's* narrator, we know, unlike Raphael, that Eve did not initially turn away from Adam to render



herself more desirable to him, but because she was disappointed by his person. In Eve's words,

...I espi'd thee, fair indeed and tall,  
Under a Platan, yet methought less fair,  
Less winning soft, less amiably mild,  
Than that smooth wat'ry image.

(PL 4: 477-80)

What makes Adam's reinterpretation of Eve's story doubly disturbing, therefore, is that he knows this fact too, for it is to him that Eve relates her first experiences as an autonomous being. Eve's autonomy, however, is exactly what cannot be tolerated in Milton's male supremacist Paradise. To establish man's ascendancy over woman, Adam in this scene thus proceeds to blackmail Eve with "an ontological debt [to him] she has unwittingly incurred" (Froula 328). And what Adam extorts from Eve is her right to represent her self.<sup>11</sup> That Adam can so easily discount the authority of Eve's clearly articulated experience consequently stands as a symptom of that first act of violence, that seizure of her hand by his (PL 4: 488-89), by which he co-opted her into his masculinist suzerainty.

Thus educated into her ontological secondariness by Adam, Eve is encouraged to consider him the author and end of her existence:

...O thou for whom

And from whom I was form'd flesh of thy flesh,  
 And without whom am to no end, my Guide  
 And Head.

(PL 4: 440-43)

For Milton's woman, it seems, the universe is androcentric rather than theocentric. Man's law, not God's, is to govern her destiny (PL 4: 635-38). Furthermore, because she is seen to be created from man, she is permitted to approach God only through man: he will be for God, she will be for "God in him" (299). Yet this worship of God in man comes dangerously close to the idolatry Milton deplored: the worship of the creature instead of the Creator.<sup>12</sup> Evidently, Eve's end as woman does not sort well with her end as one of the genus Man.

Even Adam is confused by the inconsistencies which seem to inhere in Eve's character as a result of her conflicting subject positions. The masculinist theory to which he subscribes insists that this woman should be entirely subordinated to him: "in the prime end/Of Nature" she is supposed to be "th'inferior" (PL 8: 540-41). But, in practice, this being, who is a human, inevitably exceeds those limitations which a male supremacist creed attempts to impose on her. That is, she seems complete in herself to Adam because she is herself complete (548).

Beset by such tensions, Milton's theodicy, overlaid as it is by a masculinist ethic, almost becomes undone at this point. This crisis occurs when Adam, still attempting to account for the independent existence of this woman whom his philosophy says is to be entirely for him, wonders why,

Authority and Reason on her wait,  
As one intended first, not after made  
Occasionally.

(PL 8: 554-56)

In a move that is almost blasphemous, Adam thus undermines the high providence of the Creator, who did not make Eve as an afterthought, but who intended her creation from the beginning. Telling his story to Raphael, Adam himself relates God's stated intention: "I, ere thou spak'st,/Knew it not good for Man to be alone"(444-45). Moreover, Raphael in his previous story repeatedly emphasized to Adam God's conviction that creation as a whole was good (PL 7: 249, 309, 337, 353, 395, 549). If the man and the angel would follow the logic of their own propositions, they would recognize that God planned to create woman as part of his inherently good world prior to any articulation of the male's desire. Yet, in marked contrast to those other occasions when the ignorant Adam nearly strays into blasphemy (e.g., PL 8: 5-202), Raphael

does not correct Adam's present questionings of God's care and foresight. Obviously, at this moment either God's providence or the principles of male supremacy must be left in doubt. It is significant that Milton's angel considers the assertion of Adam's authority over Eve to be more urgent than the affirmation of the integrity of God's creation.

Man's authority, Raphael insists, is contingent upon his resolute headship. Consistent with this view, his counsel to the wavering Adam is thus to

...weigh with her thyself;  
 Then value: Oft-times nothing profits more  
 Than self-esteem, grounded on just and right  
 Well manag'd; of that skill the more thou  
     know'st,  
 The more she will acknowledge thee her Head,  
 And to realities yield all her shows.

(PL 8: 570-75) .

Here, as in his *Christian Doctrine*, Milton conceives of headship as an exercise of one type of individual's "superior rights" over another (CM 15: 121). Head/body, reason/passion, man/woman--Milton reads each of these pairs as a dual, hierarchized opposition in which priority guarantees superiority. Indeed, as Nyquist notes, much of Milton's thought is premised on this phallogocentric

principle "that to come first in order of succession is to be first and therefore best" ("Gynesis" 158). Milton's Eve, made after man, is certainly subject to this condition. In consequence, even prior to the curse enjoined upon her at the Fall she is to be completely under the power of her male counterpart.

This particular view of headship as a paradigm of power characterizes what Margaret Thickstun identifies as "the Pauline metaphysics of gender" that dominated orthodox seventeenth-century Puritan thought (4). As Thickstun says, the ontological equation of woman with body and man with disembodied head served at this time to reify a "definitive hierarchy of capacity as well as status" in the gendered couple (6). Yet, this authoritative interpretation of headship did not go unchallenged in seventeenth-century English culture. Rachel Speght, for one, argued in her early seventeenth-century tract, *A Mouzell for Melastomus*, that a man's imputed position as head of the female/male couple should not shore up his status at the expense of women's. Though Speght, who takes the Pauline epistles as gospel truth, concedes that a man may accurately be called "'the woman's head' (I Cor. xi. 3)", she nevertheless claims that through this title "yet of supremacy no authority hath he given him to domineer, or basely command and employ his

wife as a servant; but hereby is he taught the duties which he oweth unto her" (72). And, according to Speght, these duties include all housework; hence, men who "lay the whole burden of domestical affairs and maintenance on the shoulders of their wives" are to be censured (70). Margaret Fell Fox, writing in 1667, similarly considered headship to be a genuinely pastoral rather than a corrupt priestly office. In what she calls the True Church "Christ is the Head of the Male and Female, who may speak; and the Church is called a *Royal Priesthood*; so the Woman must offer as well as the Man" (17). Concluding her defense of women's right to speak publicly, she additionally argues that, because "Christ is the Husband, to the Woman as well as the Man, all being comprehended to be the Church" (16-17), women as well as men are authorized to seek instruction from Christ in the congregation. In the closing years of the seventeenth century, Mary Astell also would interpret man's headship in terms of his obligations instead of his privileges. In particular, she maintains in her *Reflections Upon Marriage* that the duty and true interest of the male head of a household is not to arrogate absolute power to himself, but to express

the Image of the Deity impress'd upon a generous  
and godlike Mind, a Mind that is above this

World, to be sure above all the Vices, the Tricks and Baseness of it; a Mind that is not full of it self, not contracted to little private Interests, but in imitation of that glorious pattern it endeavors to Copy after, expands and diffuses it self to its utmost capacity in doing Good. (33)

In sum, these three seventeenth-century English women, asserting their difference of view, all defined headship in terms of the sort of service that Christ as Head offered to his Church rather than as a type of feudal seigniorship in which the female functions as a vassal to her male lord.

Significantly, Milton's Son expresses just such a view of headship. He is granted his role as humankind's head because he is good, loving, and humble, not because he is great, glorious, or high (PL 3: 308-14). And, in keeping with his character, instead of asserting his sovereignty over his charges he freely assumes "the form of servant" so that he may tend to their most mundane needs (PL 10: 214). In *Paradise Regained*, the Son in his human incarnation again iterates this standard of headship when he determines "[t]o conquer Sin and Death the two grand foes,/By Humiliation and strong Sufferance," using "[h]is weakness" to "o'ercome Satanic strength" (PR 1:

159-60; 161). Adam's insistence on his priority and consequent superiority begins to seem almost satanic by comparison.

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So, in this Christian epic full of possibilities, an epic poem composed during a historical period in which the tenets of Christianity themselves were subject to numerous possible interpretations, what sort of fate do the first man and the first woman fall into? Significantly, to start Book IX--the Book of the Fall--the epic narrator of *Paradise Lost* enunciates a specific lament over the narrowed range of opportunities in the postlapsarian world:

No more of talk where God or Angel Guest  
 With Man, as with his Friend, familiar us'd  
 To sit indulgent, and with him partake  
 Rural repast, permitting him the while  
 Venial discourse, unblam'd.

(PL 9: 1-5)

But, as we know, even prior to the Fall the privilege of direct discourse with God or God's regents was denied the woman. As Adam's education by Raphael indicates, even in an unfallen world she is to be peripheral to, when not excluded from, the conversation between man and angel. Hence, because the woman's education has been mediated by



man from the beginning, the consequence of the Fall which the narrator first highlights in Book IX has little bearing on her. Moreover, since she has always been debarred from the conversation between man and God, the cessation of such discourse cannot truly be said to be her loss. Instead, as Milton suggests in *The Christian Doctrine*, woman's doom consists in having her already subordinate position with respect to man firmly reinforced by God's decree: "to thy Husband's will/Thine shall submit, hee over thee shall rule" (PL 10: 195-96; cf. CD CM 15: 121).

Adam's second education in the final two books of *Paradise Lost* also serves to reinforce both the mediated status of woman and the resultant prerogative of man to interpret the world and God's word to her. Having pronounced the need for humankind's expulsion from the grounds of Paradise, Milton's God proceeds in Book XI to direct the arch-angel Michael on a two-fold mission: first, to "reveal/To *Adam* what shall come in future days"; and, second, to announce the "Cov'nant in the woman's seed renew'd" (113-14, 116). Thus does God assign Adam the role of translating the divine covenant through spoken discourse, a covenant which he will embody in Eve. Phrased otherwise, man is to interpret the word of God figuratively; woman, to bear the Word literally. As Eve

herself says, she is graced by God as the physical source of immortal life, while Adam is favored with the discursive power to name her as this source:

...Mother of all Mankind,  
 Mother of all things living, since by thee  
 Man is to live, and all things live for Man.

(PL 11: 159-61)

As a result of their imputed roles, therefore, even though Adam and Eve together approach God through prayer after the Fall, Adam continues to act as a priest-like intercessor:

...For since *I* sought  
 By Prayer th'offended Deity to appease,  
 Kneel'd and before him humbl'd all *my* heart,  
*Me* thought *I* saw him placable and mild,  
 Bending his ear; persuasion in *me* grew  
 That *I* was heard with favor; peace return'd  
 Home to *my* Breast, and to *my* memory  
 His promise, that thy Seed shall bruise our  
 Foe.<sup>13</sup>

(PL 11: 148-55; *my italics*)

Even Nature's signs are under Adam's interpretative sway:

O *Eve*, some furdur change awaits us nigh,  
 Which Heav'n by these mute signs in Nature shows

Forerunners of his purpose.

(PL 11: 193-95)

In this manner, man's dominating perspective makes woman's view superfluous to the symbolic system which will structure his authoritative interpretation of meaning, action and history in the fallen world. It is not surprising, then, that when the arch-angel Michael appears in Eden, Adam enjoins Eve to retire swiftly and silently from the scene (236-37).

Yet, though veiled from the sight of Michael, who "as Man/Clad to meet Man" (PL 11: 239-40) summarily informs Adam of God's decision to evict the human couple from Paradise, Eve does not remain silent. Instead, from within the seclusion to which Adam has consigned her, she begins to cry at length against the angel's stern pronouncement (268-85). Michael's interruption of her lament is nevertheless succinct and to the point:

Lament not *Eve*, but patiently resign  
 What justly thou hast lost; nor set thy heart,  
 Thus over-fond, on that which is not thine;  
 Thy going is not lonely, with thee goes  
 Thy Husband, him to follow thou art bound;  
 Where he abides, think there thy native soil.

(PL 11: 287-92)

Eve, then, is to submit not only to God's absolute decrees, but also to her husband's. The woman, in short, is to be bound both by God's law and by man's. Adam's lesson in obedience to God alone stands in marked contrast to this injunction which the angel lays upon the woman.

In a further contrast, which the arch-angel mentions only incidentally, Eve is to "sleep below" while Adam "to foresight wak'st" (PL 11: 368). In particular, like Adam in his infancy, Eve after the Fall must learn through "the Cell/Of Fancy" (PL 8: 461-62), which functions at the level of emotion rather than reason. Moreover, as Adam explained to Eve after her satanically induced dream, fancy as a lesser faculty is meant to serve reason as chief (PL 5: 100-102). Since Adam as man is also to be chief in the gendered human community, woman therefore must fulfill a similarly subordinate role to him. Accordingly, Eve will be lulled into a childlike state characterized by the inferior faculty of fancy while Adam will grow fully into superior knowledge and wisdom through his continued education as a mature man. Hence, in spite of the fact that Eve was created as an equally rational creature in order to satisfy the requirements of Milton's Arminian theodicy, she still needs to rely on man's well-tutored reason to govern her choice. To borrow a phrase

from *Areopagitica*, she is to be "captivated under a perpetuall childhood of prescription" (CM 4: 310).

But this restriction of a fully rational creature to the partial estate of childhood is not the only inconsistency into which Milton's God's final emissary in *Paradise Lost* stumbles. For instance, at one point in his story he impresses on Adam the importance of man's maintaining his place over woman (PL 11: 635-36), while at another he asserts that God "human left from human free" (PL 12: 71). Furthermore, though he despises those carnal priests who would force a person's conscience (520-22), he insists that woman is bound to follow her husband's behests unquestioningly (PL 11: 291). As Mary Wollstonecraft would say, "into similar inconsistencies are great men often led by their senses" (*VinWmn* 20).

In the end, then, despite the possibilities for non-hierarchical, non-oppressive forms of social relations which *Paradise Lost* suggests, the overall dynamic of the poem is posited on a divinely sanctioned male supremacist rule. Adam is authorized as Man, and so is accorded the privilege of unmediated access to his Maker. Due to his station as a male, he is therefore able to fulfill what Milton believed is the ultimate duty of Man: to obey God above all else. In contrast, though Eve occasionally joins Adam in his unmediated communication with God and

the angels, her specific duty is defined always in relation to this man. In Adam's estimation,

...nothing lovelier can be found  
In Woman, than to study household good,  
And good works in her Husband to promote.

(PL 9: 232-34)

And since he sees Eve only in relation to himself, when he does not deign to include her in his orisons or conversations she must receive her knowledge at his discretion. In addition to this mediated knowledge, moreover, Eve is also indoctrinated into the values of a patriarchal culture through a kind of childlike sleep which speaks to the fancy and affects the heart. Adam, in contrast, is acutely awakened to God's spirit at such portentous moments as Michael's relation of humankind's future by virtue of his mature manhood. Thus, though he too learns through dreams--when he is beckoned into Paradise and when the woman is created (PL 8: 287-309; 452-90)--he is specifically taught never to follow an implicit faith.

To follow an implicit faith, however, is precisely Eve's fate. In order to remain in Paradise, she must accept without argument her end under man's law. By doing so, she thus falls smoothly into her role as a sweet and attractive part of Adam's estate, as Adam thinks she

should. Possibly she may rise by merit to man's station,  
for has not Raphael said that

...time may come when men  
With Angels may participate.

\*\*\*

And from these corporal nutriments perhaps  
Your bodies may at last turn all to spirit,  
Improv'd by tract of time.

(PL 5: 493-94; 496-98; cf. PL 7: 157)

And if her femaleness, defined by Raphael as ontological difference, precludes her from full participation in the prerogatives of Man, she can always hope for a better life in heaven, where the angels "[c]an either Sex assume, or both" (PL 1: 424)--that is, if she keeps her place on earth. Or she can try that forbidden fruit which possibly will render her

...more equal, and perhaps,  
A thing not undesirable, sometime  
Superior: for inferior who is free?

(PL 9: 823-25)

Yet it is just this type of gender equity that is utterly interdicted in the masculinist human society of Milton's epic poem. The fruit of Eve's indecorous ambition to become as man consequently can only be her descent into increasing servitude in a strengthened male supremacist

regime. "[A]ll her spirits compos'd/To meek submission"  
(PL 12: 596-97): this according to Milton is the ideal end  
of woman in a world which belongs to men only.



#### Chapter 4:

#### The Making of a Man in *Samson Agonistes* and Man's Mediation of Women

What makes a man? Or, to phrase this question more precisely, what specific qualities constitute masculine identity at any given place and time? This is a question which preoccupies Milton throughout his prose and poetical works. Indeed, because he pointedly restricts the prerogatives of liberty to mature men only,<sup>1</sup> the institution of a standard criteria for manhood becomes a paramount concern for him. Though many theoretical models may be used to examine the construction of masculine identity--ranging from Freud's biological determinism, to Engels's cultural materialism, to the existential approach de Beauvoir employs in the *Second Sex*, to Lacan's post-structuralist version of the oedipal paradigm, to Chodorow's socio-psychoanalytic view of gender construction<sup>2</sup>--I will confine myself in this chapter to an analysis of the modifiers Milton uses to describe what he deems to be a 'real' man vis-a-vis the normative seventeenth-century, Anglo-European definition of a man against which he specifically reacts. Prior to examining how Milton constructs the male protagonist of *Samson Agonistes* as a man, and the consequent results of the development of this man for the female characters in the

Samson story, I therefore must begin with a brief survey of Milton's developing conception of the masculine character.

Adam, Milton's primal man, is characterized by a constitution formed for contemplation and valor, an upward-looking eye, and a mien which declares absolute rule (PL 4: 297-303). Yet, though the prelapsarian Adam is a perfect man, he is not necessarily exemplary. In fact, his own ideal of manhood, which in his ignorance he bases on the preeminence of martial might, must constantly be corrected by various heavenly messengers. Naively interpreting the battle between the Son and the Serpent as a contest of arms, he is cautioned by Michael to "[d]ream not of thir fight,/As of a Duel, or the local wounds/Of head or heel" (PL 12: 386-88). As the arch-angel emphasizes, Christ's meek self-sacrifice, and not a show of arms, ultimately will crush Satan's strength and thereby defeat Sin and Death (430-31). Earlier, Raphael similarly stressed the lesson that "Great/Or Bright infers not Excellence" in order to warn Adam against falling for either the lure of the splendid and incomprehensible universe or that of the magnificent Lucifer (PL 8: 90-91). Still, in spite of the angel's present success in clearing Adam's mind of any doubt concerning the cosmic economy, the temptation to treat the aggressive, imperious,

powerful figure of Satan as the paragon of heroic manhood continues to trouble Adam and his sons (cf. PL 11: 689-97).

True manliness, Adam needs to learn, transcends that brute strength which inheres in the male body. It is, instead, a quality of self-esteem. But it is a particular quality of self-esteem which must be measured against the inferior standard that is woman in Milton's male supremacist paradise. Accordingly, when Adam expresses uncertainty about his manly status, Raphael's categorical advice is

... [to] weigh with her thyself;  
Then value: Oft-times nothing profits more  
Than self-esteem, grounded on just and right  
Well-manag'd.

(PL 8: 570-73)

Later, the Son with his stern rebuke to an Adam Milton believed fell from uxoriousness<sup>3</sup> also will reinforce this measure of manhood for the human male:

Was shee thy God, that her thou didst obey  
Before his voice, or was she made thy guide,  
Superior, or but equal, that to her  
Thou didst resign thy Manhood.

(PL 10: 145-48; cf. PL 11: 634-36)

In a pattern which I traced at length in Chapter Three, Milton's gendering of the generic Man here functions to establish the first man's ontological, and therefore social, superiority over females as a fundamental quality of the male psyche.

Unlike Adam, who does not always measure up to the exemplary masculine character which Milton posits in his grand epic, the Son in *Paradise Regained* presents a pattern of manhood which adheres wholly to the ideal sanctioned by the divine voice. To start, because he withstands his temptation in his capacity as a "man of men" (PR 1: 123), Jesus offers an example of steadfast obedience to God's will upon which his followers may model themselves.<sup>4</sup> And, presumably, just as men and women alike belong to the race of Man, women and men both may aspire to "the better fortitude/Of Patience and Heroic Martyrdom" that the Son of God expresses in his human incarnation (PL 9: 31-32). But Milton's Jesus also displays a specifically masculine character. This manly character, moreover, is set in diametrical opposition to the demonic ideal espoused by Satan and his crew. These fallen spirits, all of whom assume the shape of the male sex, valorize a masculine norm grounded on the will-to-know, the will-to-glory, and the will-to-power. The "manlier objects" Satan intends to offer Jesus consequently consist

"[o]f worth, of honor, glory, and popular praise" (PR 2: 225, 227). The Son in "his great warfare" with humankind's mortal enemies (PR 1: 158)--Satan, Sin and Death--nevertheless intends to transcend this traditional masculine type. Accoutered with God's grace, he will overcome Satan's much vaunted might "[b]y Humiliation and strong Sufferance" (PR 1: 160). So doing, he will fulfill in spirit the law of manly conduct which Adam recites at the end of his indoctrination into divine values:

Henceforth I learn, that to obey is best,  
 And love with fear the only God, to walk  
 As in his presence, ever to observe  
 His providence, and on him sole depend,  
 Merciful over all his works, with good  
 Still overcoming evil, and by small  
 Accomplishing great things, by things deem'd  
       weak  
 Subverting worldly strong, and worldly wise  
 By simply meek.

(PL 12: 561-69)

Since these values of meekness, selflessness, patience, and weakness typically have been considered in western patriarchal cultures to be feminine virtues,<sup>5</sup> then can women also pattern themselves on this example of Jesus's manly character? Or does the image of Jesus as a

gendered man, as opposed to a representative of generic Man, disqualify women from completely following in his footsteps? In *Fictions of the Feminine* (1988), her analysis of the most salient English literary productions of the seventeenth century, Margaret Thickstun argues that in works such as Spenser's *Fairie Queene*, Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* "a recurrent pattern emerges in which male protagonists displace females from the positive roles women traditionally inhabited and come to personify virtues women conventionally represented" (1). That is, as men in the Puritan era subsumed into their masculine character qualities previously considered feminine, they simultaneously reconstituted women as beings constitutionally incapable of emulating this new mode of manhood. And they did so despite the fact that this new image of man closely resembled the traditional concept of woman. To determine whether this imperialist tendency is at work throughout Milton's *oeuvre*, we will now turn from those suggestions in *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* that the revised model for Man's conduct belongs to men only to Milton's more explicit articulation of this shift in some of the autobiographical passages in his prose.

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Having been labelled 'the Lady of Christ's' by his companions at Christ's College, Cambridge, Milton had a personal stake in realigning the accepted epitome of manhood from an aggressive, physical heroism to a heroism of mind and morals. In his *Second Defense of the People of England*, for instance, he attempts to exculpate himself from the charge that when he abstained from physical combat during the civil war he acted as less than a man by stating:

For though I did not participate in the toils or dangers of the war, yet I was at the same time engaged in a service not less hazardous to myself and more beneficial to my fellow citizens.

([Hughes] 818)

Admitting that his "mind had always been stronger than [his] body," he then proceeds to establish a code of heroic conduct that equates the intellectual employments for which he is best suited with the achievements of those warriors who boldly defended "the truth...by arms" (819). Manliness, Milton concludes, is not a function of physical prowess.

In his *Apology for Smectymnuus*, Milton again will respond to slurs against his high concept of manhood: this time by a libellous confuter who asserts that the bordello

is one of his favorite afternoon haunts. Milton's immediate response is to deny this charge flatly, dismissing it as one of several "causelesse aspersions" and "insolent suspicions" (CM 3, i: 296, 297). But to respond completely to this slur against his manly character he additionally finds that he must denounce the sexual double standard of his day, which he does in distinctly masculinist terms:

if unchastity in a woman whom Saint *Paul* terms the glory of man, be such a scandall and dishonour, then certainly in a man who is both the image and glory of God it must, though commonly not so thought, be much more deflouring and dishonourable. (CM 3, i: 306)

Thus, in this apology Milton counters contemporary opinion by maintaining that manliness does not depend on a demonstration of sexual prowess either.

However, it is in *Prolusion VI*, a college entertainment in which he plays the role of *paterfamilias* to his peers, that Milton responds most explicitly to what customarily has been considered true manliness in his culture. Authorized by his paternal guise, he begins his playful harangue by challenging those of his classmates who labelled him 'the Lady' to account for his classification as a feminine figure:



But how is it that I have so suddenly been made a Father? May the gods protect me! What is the wonder that beats anything in Pliny's books? Have I done violence to some snake and suffered the fate of Tiresias? Or has some Thessalian witch anointed me with magic salve? Or like old Caenius, have I been violated by some god and bought my male sex as the price of my dishonor, so that in this sudden way I have been changed from a woman to a man? ([Hughes] 620)

Yet the young Milton is not content to limit his rhetoric to accounts of castration only, for in his mind manhood inheres in qualities above the physical. These qualities consequently are not the wonted hardness, strength and aggressive sexuality that his culture conventionally identifies with the masculine. Preparing to expound his re-visionary model of the gendered man, he therefore continues:

And why do I seem to them to be so little of a man? Is there no respect for Priscian? Do these grammaticasters attribute the marks of the masculine to the feminine gender? It is because I have never been able to swallow mighty potations like the all-round athletes; or doubtless because my hand has not been hardened

by holding the plough; or because I never sprawled on my back in the midday sun like a seven-year ox-driver; or perhaps because I have never showed myself to be a man in the way that those debauchees do.<sup>6</sup> (620)

If he is a feminine man, he proclaims, he is far superior to such asinine he-men.<sup>7</sup> But Milton does not consider himself in the least degree to be a feminine being. Using the words of Hortensius, he accordingly concludes his present defense of his manhood by establishing against his society's normative image of a real man the heterodox dictum that genuine manliness is represented only by those, like himself, who express culture, urbanity, and refinement (620).

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Considering the standard for manhood that Milton assiduously attempts to erect throughout his career--meek, selfless, genteel, albeit always superior to all women--his last portrait of a man seems positively atavistic. Big, bold, and lauded for his brute strength, Milton's Samson is a veritable throwback to that sort of crude Cro-Magnon-like man Milton repudiated as early as *Prolusion VI*. Yet one of the most persistent themes in the closet drama *Samson Agonistes* is the constitution of Samson as a real man. His angst, as we will see, derives as much from

his flaccid masculinity as it does from his fall from God's grace.

When we first meet Milton's Samson, he is lying prone, his spirits drooping, "a Prisoner chain'd" of the Philistine overlords (line 7). This once-great warrior, who asserts that he was "[d]esign'd for great exploits" (32), appears absolutely and irremediably deflated by the circumstances of his bleak fate. His humiliation, however, is enforced not only by the external fetters which bind him to his low station as a fellow of slaves and animals. Far more humiliating for him is the knowledge that by betraying the secret of his masculine strength "weakly to a woman" (50) he has also compromised his superior status as a man. "O impotence of mind, in body strong!" (52), he wails, thus gendering his spirit as surely as he genders his male body.<sup>8</sup> If he is to get up, therefore, the reassertion of his manly potency is as essential as, if not more essential than, his meek accession to his role as God's chosen vessel.

Samson's gradual erection from abysmal despair to firm confidence in his capacity to act once again as God's champion is paralleled by the changes in his physical posture. As John Huntley indicates:

At the beginning, Samson is said to be lying....He is properly imagined as propping his

head to speak with the Chorus and perhaps supports himself by the elbow to speak with Manoa...with Dalila...Samson is to be imagined speaking from a sitting position. He must be standing when he swings his fist and hurls his challenges at Harapha. (142)

And, as numerous critics have further noted, Dalila in particular provides the necessary stimulus to excite Samson to stand up and assert his manly prowess against Harapha. The majority of these critics nonetheless see Dalila's verbal gyrations as merely a means of inducing Samson's spiritual regeneration.<sup>8</sup> That Samson ever seriously reforms his self-centered and strictly literal understanding of his mission as God's champion is a moot point. Responding to the customary critical assumption that Samson is "roused from his servile apathy to a renewed heroism," Ashraf H.A. Rushdy demonstrates that Milton's Samson actually remains a vacillating, unsteady character who despite himself eventually performs an act which is "selfless to the degree of dying" and yet who continues to be "selfish to an irreducible level" ("Garden" 171, 193). To Rushdy's conclusion that the presuppositions upon which the critics base their 'regeneration theory' serve to misconstrue Milton's theological doctrine of regeneration, I would like to add

that the narrow critical focus on the mechanics of Samson's supposed regeneration also functions to obscure the uneasy dynamics of gender construction in this play. Because at this point I wish to avoid the limitations of such a narrow view, the contentious issue of Samson's regeneration will not preoccupy me here. Instead, I am interested in how Samson's perception of the female figure, Dalila, shores up his sagging masculinity. That is, how does this sorely flattened male, formerly "[m]atchless in might" (178), reconstitute himself into what he considers to be a real man: one who is always ready and eminently able to fight with his fists for the Good Old Cause?

With the arrival of his chorus of friends, Samson revives sufficiently to confess his case. His sin, as he said once before and will say again and again, was to have foolishly "divulg'd the secret gift of God/To a deceitful Woman"<sup>10</sup> (201-02). Yet, it seems that to speak his secret to the opposite sex is an error to which Samson is particularly prone. To hear him tell the tale of his downfall, his first wife wrested his sacred secret from him "in her height/Of Nuptial Love profest" (384-85), a moment we may well read as the climactic point in their conjugal intercourse. Next, Dalila, his second wife,

...also in her prime of love,

Spousal embraces, vitiated with Gold,  
 Though offer'd only, by the scent conceiv'd  
 Her spurious first-born.

(388-91)

Clearly, if strength, not sex, is the secret Samson feels impelled to express, his strength nevertheless functions as a metonymy for his masculine sexuality as a whole. Cutting his hair, as he explicitly states, is equivalent to his essential castration; sheared, he is "[l]ike a tame Wether" (538). It is indeed Samson's misfortune that when God gave him the strength that marks him as a man "to show withal/How slight the gift was, [he] hung it in [his] Hair" (59-60).

Samson's crime, then, is his "[s]hameful garrulity" (491), a crime rendered all the more heinous in his mind for having been committed as a result of the goadings of a woman. As he explicitly states, in his estimation the fundamental source of his shame indubitably lies in his facile submission to his second wife when, "with a grain of manhood well resolv'd," he "[m]ight easily have shook off all her snares" (408, 409). Yet, above all else, he says, it is his own "foul effeminacy" (410), apparently fostered by the "fair fallacious looks" of the female Dalila (533), that led to his servile state of mind, a state of mind without which he never could have been

enslaved by the Philistine lords (412-13). Several commentators, basing their argument on Samson's statement, "I myself have brought [these evils] on,/Sole author I, sole cause" (375-76), maintain that Samson does not impute responsibility for his fall into servitude onto the females with whom he has been intimate.<sup>11</sup> However, the elision of the potentially treasonous effeminacy within Samson with the female characters without him makes his occasional assertions of his personal culpability extremely suspect.<sup>12</sup> He may begin his defense of Jehovah's justice by imputing, quite rightly, the blame for his own failures onto himself, but he soon shifts into a discourse of blame which casts women as inevitable scapegoats. No longer does he admit that it was he who betrayed his God; instead, he insists that first one woman, then another betrayed him and so impelled him to betray his God (376-419).

The Chorus will later reinforce this male's tendency to impute blame onto the objects of his desire when they reassure Samson that "beauty...hath strange powers" to ensnare the wisest men (1003; cf. 210-12). Like Belial, the lascivious angel in *Paradise Regained*, Samson's friends defer the moral agency of men by imputing a male's desire onto women.<sup>13</sup> In perhaps a more significant parallel, even the first man, Adam, falls into this

rhetoric of blame. When he laments that he is "only weak/Against the charm of Beauty's powerful glance" (PL 8: 532-33), he too imposes his desire onto a woman so that he may absolve himself of responsibility for his passions. Samson, who similarly imputes his desire onto his second wife, with the consequent transfer of culpability for his indecorous passion from himself to her, is thus truly Adam's son. However, in contrast to Adam he falls short of the high standard of esteem which a man must meet in order to stay above female human beings. His descent into what he calls Dalila's snares accordingly seems to him not only ignoble and infamous, but contemptibly unmanly (417). As he says, a man can be brought no lower than to be "effeminately vanquish't" (562). Therefore, for Samson to become a real man once more, he must prove to himself and to his peers that he is absolutely not-woman.

If heaven, to follow Milton's Adam in one of his more misogynistic moments, is to be populated by masculine spirits only (PL 10: 888-90), hell for such a male supremacist surely must be a place in which all spirits are made over into the feminine. Having fallen from his peak of manhood, the once "Heroic,...Renown'd, /Irresistible *Samson*" (125-26) certainly occupies this hell. And, as with Satan, this hell is himself. This opposition of the once manly champion with the now



effeminate slave, however, is a distinct departure from the biblical story. In Judges, Samson does not fall from masculine might to feminine weakness. Instead, he warns Dalila that if his strength is breached, he "shall...be weak, and be as another man" (Judges 16: 7, 11, 17). It is telling, therefore, that Milton replaces this range of male capabilities within which the scriptural Samson is set with a binary opposition that contrasts man and woman, masculinity and femininity. Undoubtedly, the most pertinent effect of Milton's imposition of this distinctly phallogocentric paradigm in *Samson Agonistes* is the enforcement of a hierarchy of gendered values which is conspicuously absent from the archaic Samson story.

Milton alters the scriptural story of Samson in several other meaningful ways. Chief among these changes is his casting of Dalila as Samson's wife instead of his whore. Ricki Heller, following the neo-Christian approach of John Halkett, argues in her article "Opposites of Wifehood: Eve and Dalila" (1988) that Milton made Dalila a married woman in order to impel "us to evaluate [her] in terms of her capacity as Samson's spouse" (196). Since Dalila is completely unmindful of her subordinate position as helpmeet in the male supremacist marriage scheme which Milton promotes, she consequently seems "the antithesis of a fit mate" (196). That is,

The actions she interprets as proper wifely duties--namely, dispensing her "nursing diligence" (SA 924) to her husband--only serve to denigrate Samson's proper status as husband and place her in the unnatural [*sic*] position of marital authority. (198)

While Heller's accession to the male supremacist value that a proper wife will remain beneath her husband is troubling, her recognition that marriage in *Samson Agonistes* is more than a personal relationship is apt. In fact, Samson several times refers to Dalila's offence against him in unambiguously political terms. Treating marriage as a state in which the man should reign supreme, he speaks of her breach of the conjugal bond as a "Matrimonial treason" (959; cf. 391). To his mind, Dalila is thus not only his estranged wife, but also his traitress (725).

This conception of the marriage relationship as a mini-kingdom in which man is granted the divine right to govern is repeated throughout Milton's prose and poetical works. In *Paradise Lost*, God himself decrees male supremacist rule in the fallen world when his Son says to the woman, "to thy Husband's will/Thine shall submit, hee over thee shall rule" (PL 10: 195-96). Here, as in *Samson Agonistes*, the authoritative voice in Milton's cosmos

establishes what Samson's Chorus approvingly calls man's "despotic power/ Over his female in due awe" (1054-55). In his *Christian Doctrine* Milton further reinforces this belief that God ordained man's sovereignty over women from the beginning. Using the full weight of his amassed selections from the Christian scriptures to support his opinion, he maintains that the curse laid upon woman in Genesis 3: 16 increased the husbandly powers which were already inherent in the make-up of man (CM 15: 121). Moreover, throughout his political tracts Milton adopts the creed that the people of England will be truly free only when each adult male obtains full rule over his respective domicile. As he stresses in his *Second Defense of the People of England*, "he in vain makes a vaunt of liberty in the senate or in the forum, who languishes under the vilest servitude, to an inferior at home" ([Hughes] 831).

Royalism in the sexual-political sphere, republicanism in the sphere of national politics: herein lies the primary contradiction in Milton's thought. And in *Samson Agonistes*, where the ostensibly private marriage relationship is unquestioningly a political battle ground, this contradiction becomes glaringly apparent. The politics which pertain to Samson's marriages clearly do not stop with his activities as a Hebrew infiltrator and

crack terrorist within the ranks of the Philistines. As we will soon see, the institution of patriarchal power within the household is just as pertinent to the welfare of God's chosen people as is the elimination of aristocratic power in the state. Hence, just as in the balance of Milton's prose and poetical works, here in *Samson Agonistes* the crux of the larger political struggle rests on the central pillar of male supremacism: "the birthright priority whereby males rule females" (Millett 33). Within the total context of Milton's anti-aristocratic thought, however, this final pillar of custom and superstition seems very shaky indeed.

Nonetheless, to be a real man in Milton's universe a male must expound such sexist doctrine, no matter how illogical. Without question, Milton's Samson believes that as a man he must maintain a higher station than a woman. But does Samson's anger against Dalila, which considering his maimed and manacled condition as a slave at his enemies' mill is quite just,<sup>14</sup> make him a misogynist? And, to push this line of questioning still further, does the tenor of the text as a whole take a misogynistic tack? This concern has perplexed generations of Milton critics, many of whom tend to read the acrimonious scene between Dalila and Samson as evidence of Milton's own deep-seated hatred of women.<sup>15</sup> Granted, the

chorus composed of Samson's friends and countrymen does expound the sort of hate propaganda against women that has marred much of the dominant discourse of western culture throughout the past two millennia. The sexist sentiments underlying such statements as "She's gone, a manifest Serpent" (997) and "Is it for that such outward ornament/Was lavish't on thir Sex, that inward gifts/Were left for haste unfinish't" (1025-27), for instance, were rife in the antifeminist literature of the Renaissance.<sup>18</sup> Arch-women-haters all, the members of this chorus continually make the characteristically misogynistic gesture of extrapolating one woman's faults to all women, a gesture Milton's Adam falls into during his most abject postlapsarian moments (PL 10: 867-908). But is Milton's Samson, angry as he is, guilty of this offense? In order to try Samson's case fairly, and by extension Milton's, we must now take a close and detailed look at the actual dynamics of the exchange between Dalila and Samson.

Dalila begins her plea to Samson with an expression of her apparently sincere contrition. Like Eve after the Fall, she offers to lighten Samson's sufferings and to make whatever amends to him that are in her power (744-45; cf. PL 10: 916-36). Her final estimation of her deed as "unfortunate" (747)--a deed which in contrast to Eve's was certainly committed with malice aforethought--nevertheless

casts her sincerity into doubt. Samson, though, has no doubts whatsoever about Dalila's continuing malice towards him. "Out, out Hyaena," he rages, "these are thy wonted arts./And arts of every woman false like thee" (748-49). A cursory reader might be tempted, as many critics have been, to dismiss this line as an indication of Samson's misogyny. But the syntax of this last line is subtle and slippery, and we should take a moment to dwell on it. Samson begins by condemning Dalila for her "wonted arts," which he will later list as deceit, betrayal, and hypocrisy (750). Immediately after his initial castigation of Dalila, Samson then seems to extrapolate this local criticism into an indictment of all women: "these are thy wonted arts,/And arts of every woman." Only after the reader of this phrase is offered the option of making this misogynistic leap does Samson add the codicil, "false like thee." Thus does Samson ultimately limit his charges to those members of the female sex who specifically conform to Dalila's type. The effect of this passage as a whole--a passage which anticipates the reader's response to Samson's apparent generalization and corrects it only afterwards--is consequently to try each reader's own propensity to misogyny. It is disheartening to discover that numerous critics of *Samson Agonistes* fail this test utterly.

Significantly, the first undeniable instance of misogyny in the exchange between Dalila and Samson comes out of the mouth of Dalila herself. Changing her tone from one of contrition to one of self-justification, she attempts to convince Samson of the inevitability of her failings by pleading female inferiority:

First granting, as I do, it was a weakness  
 In me, but incident to all our sex,  
 Curiosity, inquisitive, importune  
 Of secrets, then with like infirmity  
 To publish them, both common female faults.

(773-77)

With this dubious self-defense, Dalila follows the typically misogynistic tack of generalizing from one woman's faults--hers--to the inherent faultiness of all women. Despite his indisputable male supremacism, however, Samson will have none of this. Dalila's weakness, he says, is not any weakness incident to the female sex as a whole, but a "weakness to resist/*Philistian* gold" particular to her only (830-31). Hence, though this male character of Milton's definitely displays extremely sexist tendencies, he is not a misogynist. Despite the fact that he tends to blame women for the results of his own desire, to insist that women are lesser beings than men, and to believe firmly that a

man possesses sovereign rights in marriage, he does not express an undisguised contempt for women. Of course, any evaluation of male supremacy as somehow less malign than misogyny is erroneous. All manifestations of patriarchal oppression are fundamentally motivated by men's acculturated hatred of women, and misogyny proper is merely a manifestation of this latent attitude. Knowing this, we may go on to note that the contempt for women which Dalila expresses and which the Chorus echoes is not at all evident in Milton's Samson without apologizing for the male supremacist attitudes he voices.

For what purpose, then, must a man such as Milton's Samson be made? Putting aside the requirement of Samson's people for a deliverer from their oppression under the Philistines, which is no inconsequential matter in this text, some answers to this question may be described in a new social institution which emerged during the seventeenth century: the restricted patriarchal nuclear family.<sup>17</sup> The lineaments of this new family type are boldly traced in Milton's divorce tracts, where he advances a man's right to disengage himself from a match which does not meet that ideal of marriage molded to the exigencies of an economy increasingly removed from its former locus in the household.<sup>18</sup> In his *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, for instance, Milton defines the



primary end of marriage as "the apt and cheerfull conversation of man with woman, to comfort and refresh him against the evill of solitary life" (CM 3, ii: 382). Read in its ideological context, this passage translates thus: a woman's duty in marriage is to provide emotional sustenance and diversionary entertainment to a man who feels increasingly alienated as a result of his public role in a society whose networks of kinship and congeniality are being rapidly rationalized into monadic units. Milton himself will express this interpretation of a wife's role with respect to her husband's in no uncertain terms in his later divorce tract, *Tetrachordon*. Glossing the line from Genesis, "And the Lord said, It is not good that man should be alone" (2: 18), he comments in this tract that a woman's function is to relieve the evils of man's solitary life by providing a private retreat where a man may slacken "the cords of intense thought and labour" (CM 4: 85). Addressing the Lords and Commons of the Parliament of England, he continues,

We cannot therefore alwayes be contemplative, or pragmaticall abroad, but have need of som delightfull intermissions, wherein the enlarg'd soul may leav off a while her severe schooling; and like a glad youth in wandring vacancy, may keep her hollidaies to joy and harmles pastime:

which as she cannot well doe without company, so in no company so well as where the different sexe in most resembling unlikenes, and most unlike resemblance cannot but please best and be pleas'd in the aptitude of that variety.<sup>18</sup>

(CM 4: 86)

Home thus becomes a haven for men wearied by the rigors of their work, which is performed in a realm removed from that private sphere which remains women's proper place. Hence when a woman does not fulfill her imputed role as man's "help and solace and delight" (CD CM 15: 163), marriage for the man is reduced to "a drooping and disconsolate household captivity, without refuge or redemption" (DDD CM 3, ii: 381). A man so caught, says Milton, is perversely compelled "to grind in the mill of an undelighted and servil copulation" (403).

This metaphor returns us to *Samson Agonistes*, whose male protagonist is literally grinding "[e]yeless in Gaza at the Mill" (line 41). Samson, however, completely divorces himself from any return to a servile copulation--be it psychic or physical--with his second wife. Indeed, the separation he effects from her is so complete that he even refuses to let her touch his hand (951-53). But what makes Samson's marriage with Dalila so irredeemably unmeet in his opinion? To start, as he complains at length to

his father, he feels that Dalila's persistent "feminine assaults" so battered him until "[a]t times when men seek most repose and rest" he "yielded" to her blandishments (403, 406, 407). Dalila, it seems, did not provide the properly peaceful milieu for her man which Milton in *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* describes as a wife's foremost duty. In fact, instead of minding the homefires for her heroic husband, she persisted in the indecorous pursuit of her own claim to public fame. Like Samson, who despite his protestations to the contrary did marry Dalila in order to achieve his own political ends (876-81; cf. 219-33), Dalila declares that she too must adhere to "the bonds of civil Duty/And of Religion" (853-54). For her, as for Samson, "to the public good/Private respects must yield" (867-68).

Yet, in a society governed by an ideology which separates a masculine public sphere from a feminine private sphere--and Milton overlays his play with just such an ideology--Dalila's arguments do not hold. Samson consequently admonishes her,

Being once a wife, for me thou wast to leave  
 Parents and country; nor was I their subject,  
 Not under their protection but my own,  
 Thou mine, not theirs.  
 (885-88)

Phrased otherwise, Dalila is to follow her husband implicitly in all things--her affective ties, her political allegiances, her faith. The Christian audience for whom Milton wrote this play would undoubtedly judge the demand that Dalila abandon her people's god for the god of Israel to be all to her benefit, in spite of the requisite forcing of her conscience.<sup>20</sup> Milton's Eve, who first avows that she will comply unquestioningly with her husband's rule and later reiterates that she will never leave his side (PL 4: 635-38; 11: 176), falls into precisely this pattern of unthinking accession to what another human being defines as her faith. And it is this pattern of credulity which a patriarchal Christian tradition honors in women.<sup>21</sup> Setting aside these sorts of biased evaluations, we know that Milton himself believed an implicit faith, even if it be in the true God, to be a false faith. In a passage which has guided my discussion of Milton's conflicting ideologies throughout this thesis, Milton insists that,

A man [*sic*] may be a heretick in the truth; and if he beleeeve things only because his Pastor sayes so, or the Assembly so determines, without knowing other reason, though his belief be true, yet the very truth he holds becomes, his heresie.

(Areo CM 4: 333)

But a heretic in the truth is exactly what Milton's Dalila must become in order to fulfill the requirements of the bourgeois patriarchal model of marriage which Milton posits as an ideal in *Samson Agonistes*.

Judging Dalila against this ideal, Mary S. Wienkauf argues in her article "Dalila: The Worst of All Possible Wives" (1973) that the husband is to represent "his wife's earthly god," that "the wife must consider him as a divine and holy being," and that a wife should silently take her husband's "words as Scripture" (138, 139, 143). Samson, conforming entirely to this creed, consequently does not maintain that Dalila should adopt his religion because it is true, but that she should renounce her heritage and assume his simply because he married her. That is, Dalila, once married, was to establish neither a personal belief of her own, nor to prove all things in her creed to her own satisfaction, nor to search diligently after truth--all these actions being, as Milton maintains in his preface to his *Christian Doctrine*, essential to the vigor and veracity of religion (CM 14: 3-15). Instead, she is to adopt demurely what Milton in this theological dissertation condemns as "an indolent credulity" (CD CM 14: 9). Milton's doctrines of spiritual liberty and male supremacism obviously do not accord well. Though he

founds his Christian ethic on the principle that each individual must acquire "a personal belief" through "the most careful perusal and meditation of the Holy Scriptures themselves," his definition of the individual as a mature male actually functions to preclude females from the moral imperative "*to prove all things*" (CD CM 14: 5, 9). By default, women are to remain bound by "those two detestable curses, slavery and superstition" (CD CM 14: 3).

To ensure the institution in the cultural canon of a code for married women that preserves the unequal balance between men and women in the restricted patriarchal marriage, even though this code contradicts his beliefs about liberty of conscience and freedom of expression, Milton had to make yet another significant alteration in the scriptural Samson story. He had to write out the mother. Margaret Homans argues in *Bearing the Word* (1986) that the prior erasure of the mother provides the primary impetus for masculinist symbolic and social systems, which necessarily maintain their momentum by forever searching for substitutes for this mother, "substitutes that can transfer her power to something that men's minds can more readily control" (4). The Law of the Father, in short, is predicated on the Murder of the Mother. And, as Homans additionally points out, only a son can search for the

forbidden body of this mother since, within the oedipal paradigm at least, the simultaneous desire to reunite with and renounce the mother is specific to the male. Certainly, within the Christian humanist paradigm to which Milton adheres the male is seen as the privileged signifier, figuratively and literally. As I demonstrated in Chapter Three, Milton's prototypical male not only represents mankind, but he possesses the concrete privilege of naming his world, which includes woman. Hence, as in *Paradise Lost*, here in *Samson Agonistes*, where the privileged signifier too is male, the autonomous voices of women must be either ruthlessly suppressed or strictly reinterpreted under an authoritative masculinist rule.

In *Judges*, though, the anonymous woman who will be Samson's mother speaks directly to God's angel, and so acts as a mediator to her husband, whom she must later instruct into God's wisdom. Margaret Fell Fox summarizes this scene thus:

And in *Judges* 13. There you may see, how the Angel appeared to a Woman, and how the Woman came to her Husband and told him, saying, a man of God came to me, whose Countenance was like the Countenance of a Man of God, and said that she should Conceive and bare a Son, and again

the Angel of the Lord appeared to the Woman, and she made hast and ran, and shewed her Husband and said unto him, behold, he hath appeared unto me that came unto me the other day, and when the Angel of the Lord was gon; the Womans Husband said, we should surely dye because we had seen God, and then you may read how *the Woman comforted her Husband again*, and said, if the Lord were pleased to kill us he would not have shewed us all these things, nor would this time have told us such things as these, and *this was a Woman that taught*.

(18-19; my italics)

Yet, in spite of the significance of the mother in the Samson story, Milton makes no mention of her central role as intercessor for and teacher of Manoa, her husband. Instead, when his Samson laments, "O wherefore was my birth from Heaven foretold/Twice by an Angel" (23-24), he uses the passive voice, and so suppresses his mother's agency.

The use of the passive voice, as Mary Daly indicates, is characteristic of patriarchal scholarship, which works "to disguise *who* are the agents of androcracy" (324) and to delete women from history. This is a tactic which Milton employs throughout *Samson Agonistes*. For instance,



though his Samson mentions that the angel "in sight/Of both my Parents all in flames ascended/From off the Altar" (24-26), he does not indicate that his mother, not his father, was the favored individual in this instance. In like manner, the voice of Samson's mother is repeatedly erased from Milton's version of the Samson story: "For this did th'Angel twice descend?" (unspoken by Manoa is the fact that the angel descended to speak to his wife only); "I was his nursling once and choice delight,/His destin'd from the womb,/Promis'd by Heavenly message twice descending" (Samson fails to specify that it was to his mother that the angel promised his birth); "Send thee the Angel of thy Birth, to stand/Fast by thy side, who from thy Father's field/Rode up in flames after his message told/Of thy conception" (the Chorus, who emphasize Samson's father's position as property owner, neglect to mention that the angel foretold Samson's conception to the woman who would be his mother alone) (361, 633-35, 1431-34).

What sort of man, then, does Milton make using these methods? A man made in God's express image, in contrast to woman who is seen to be made in the image of man. A man who possesses superior rights over women as a result of his superior masculine soul. A man whose direct access to God's voice empowers him to stand between a woman and

her divine Maker. A man whose status as woman's head ensures his liberty "to dispose and *economize* in the Land which God hath giv'n" him and his fellow males "as Maisters of Family in thir own house and free inheritance" (*TKM* CM 5: 40). Milton's Samson, though fallen to what seems to him to be the depths of effeminacy, still aspires to attain this manly station. But to do so, he must disremember his mother, the source of his inspiration and inception. "Home to his Father's house" Samson goes (1733). "To himself and Father's house" he has won "eternal fame" (1717). His wife's claim that she too will obtain fame--"But in my country, where I most desire,/In *Ekron, Gaza, Asdod*, and in *Gath*/I shall be nam'd among the famousest/Of Women" (980-83)--he utterly dismisses. The fame of his unnamed mother he has utterly forgotten. Just so must male rule erect itself on females' silenced voices. And in just this manner does a male supremacist system embody the privileges it assigns to the phallus only in those persons who possess penises.<sup>22</sup>

Still, the subtext remains. Milton's masculinist mediation of his source text can only suppress the central role of the woman's words in the scriptural Samson story. It cannot annihilate these words. Margaret Fell Fox in *Womens Speaking Justified* attests to women's enduring, though unacknowledged, contributions to the discourse of

Christianity. In this tract she condemns those "blind Priests" (14) who believe that all women should always be silent in the Church and yet who base their church doctrine on the words of such women as Mary Magdalene; Elizabeth, mother of John; Mary, mother of Jesus; the woman in the Book of Ruth who blessed Ruth in the Gate of the City; Hannah in the first chapter of Samuel; and the woman in the second chapter of Samuel (15). Fell Fox's ultimate charge against masculinist interpreters of the Christian scriptures consequently is that they "make a Trade of Womens words to get money by, and take Texts, and Preach Sermons upon Womens words; and still cry out, Women must not speak, Women must be silent" (16). As she knew, beneath the edited androcentric histories of male supremacist cultures lie the already articulated words of women. And, as she implies, the continuing presence of this suppressed discourse functions to unsettle the myth of a transcultural, transhistorical patriarchal rule. Such words, in effect, constitute the fissures in the monolithic facade of a male supremacism that in fact must continually reconstitute itself by repeatedly banishing women from its symbolic order. If we can read beyond these gaps in the stories a male supremacist culture tells itself, we can let such texts as *Samson Agonistes* speak to us of more than women's imputed place in a masculinist

society. We can let such a text speak of possibilities--possibilities suppressed though not erased--for making men and women unblinded by the patriarchal prejudices which imprison Milton's Samson.

## Chapter 5:

### The Mediated Milton:

#### Critical and Contemporary Contexts

I began this study of the contradictions which complicate Milton's sexual, social, and theological politics with a reference to 'Milton's bogey'--that misogynistic ghoul which Gilbert and Gubar argue haunts those female readers and writers paralyzed by what they see as an impervious, omnipotent patriarchal tradition. However, as the course of our investigations into the multiple tensions which striate Milton's texts has shown, neither the doctrines of male supremacy that Milton promotes nor Milton himself can be accurately viewed as monolithic. Indeed, the effect of adopting the implicit faith that either the masculinist Milton or his male supremacism operates as a unified, universal force is to deny those female voices which underlie, and even compete with, such representations and expressions of a masculinist culture. Just as there exists a variety of female voices, therefore, so too are there various Miltons. John Turner encapsulates the critics' tendency to construct 'Milton' according to their diverse ideological agendas when he says:

Thus Fish stresses the self-consuming and reader-reforming Milton, Jean Hagstrum the

celebrator of erotic friendship and castigator of Narcissism, Christopher Hill the revolutionary radical, Bloom the iconoclast and inhibitor of future generations. For others Milton is a rationalist, or a prophetic visionary, or an orthodox synthesizer of traditional opinions, or a proto-deconstructionist. Anti-misogynist critics have given us both a 'masculinist' Milton, following Virginia Woolf, and an egalitarian Milton.

(viii)

Yet, as we have discovered, though Milton's texts are rife with gaps, fissures, and inconsistencies through which people speaking as feminists can, and have, critiqued patriarchal culture, Milton remains an undeniable male supremacist. His male supremacy, moreover, manifested itself at the most material levels of women's lives: education, civic participation, the doctrine of divorce, and the discipline of the spiritual congregation. In addition, the construction by critics of that monolithic Milton who dominates the seventeenth-century English literary canon we study today has functioned in fact to erase the voices of women like Rachel Speght, Katherine Chidley, Margaret Fell Fox, and Mary Astell, among others, from the consciousness of

latter-day western culture. As readers aware of Milton's complex and contradictory ideological positions, how then do we come to terms with the oppressive legacy of his male supremacism without, as Adrienne Munich warns, leaving intact the authority of what may be misogynistic texts or what may equally be the more misogynistic interpretations imposed on such texts (240)?<sup>1</sup>

Confronting an analogous dilemma, Alice Walker in her essay "Beyond the Peacock" (1975) struggles with the specter of Flannery O'Connor, a white southern writer who alternatively inspired her as a fellow southern writer and disenfranchised her as a poor, black Southerner. Walker remarks,

As a college student in the sixties I read [O'Connor's] books endlessly, scarcely conscious of the difference between her racial and economic background and my own, but put them away in anger when I discovered that, while I was reading O'Connor--Southern, Catholic, and white--there were other women writers--some Southern, some religious, all black--I had not been allowed to know. For several years, while I searched for, found, and studied black women writers, I deliberately shut O'Connor out,

feeling almost ashamed that she had reached me first. (42)

This is a problem familiar to females and feminists who during their education in the masterpieces of English literature are invariably confronted first by an overwhelmingly male literary canon--a canon epitomized by that paradigmatic patriarch, John Milton. The interrogation of this almost exclusively male canon, which could only exist as such in a cultural milieu which tacitly genders the ostensibly generic man as male, has been one of the central projects for feminists working in academia from the mid-1970s to the present. As I indicated in Chapter One, Christine Froula, Sandra Gilbert, and Marcia Landy with their cogent, if not always completely accurate, analyses of the patriarchal prejudices in Milton's poetry all participate in this feminist critique, defined by Elaine Showalter as the exposure of "the misogyny of literary practice" including "the stereotyped images of women in literature as angels or monsters, the literary abuse or textual harassment of women in classic and popular male literature, and the exclusion of women from literary history" ("FemCrit" 5).

If one follows the course Showalter recommends in "The Feminist Critical Revolution" (1985), the next step in such a feminist project is to search for, find, and



study exclusively those female writers whose voices "had been obscured by the patriarchal values that dominate our culture" (6). This laudable, though limited, imperative spawned numerous studies focusing on "women's writing as a specific field of inquiry"<sup>2</sup> (6); Patricia Meyer Spacks's *The Female Imagination* (1975), Ellen Moer's *Literary Women* (1976), Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own* (1977) and Gilbert and Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) all belong to this gynocritical<sup>3</sup> tradition. But where does a trajectory which starts with the indictment of male writers and their misogyny and moves unswervingly to the celebration of female writers and their purportedly "specific female psychology" (7) leave readers who want to move beyond the poles of a rigid critical dichotomy? Or, in terms more germane to the topic of this thesis, what alternate paths are available to readers who want to explore the complex ideological positions of a writer such as Milton without abandoning a feminist consciousness?

One course that has been taken by pro-feminist and traditional humanist critics alike is to set Milton in the context of literary, iconographic, and theological works much more misogynistic than his own. Diane McColley takes this approach in *Milton's Eve* (1983), where she attempts "to extricate Eve from a reductive critical tradition, as Milton sought to redeem her from a reductive literary and

iconographic tradition, and to establish a regenerative reading of her role" (4). To support her claims, McColley marshals a large amount of evidence from the cultural canon that dominated Milton's era. Brueghel and Raphael, Raleigh and Vives, Tertullian and Calvin are among the prominent artists and authors she cites. Set within this antifeminist context, Milton's representation of the prototypical woman as a free agent responsible for her actions and capable of regeneration certainly does seem an improvement over "the weak and foolish being tradition made her" (218). However, McColley's analysis is limited by her humanist assumption that the socially and economically privileged males she cites speak for Renaissance culture as a whole; her conclusion that Milton's Eve "stands in radiant contrast to the sly or naive temptresses who bore her name in the works of Milton's predecessors or contemporaries" is therefore only partial (3-4).

This partial approach is also evident in Anne Ferry's 1988 article, "Milton's Creation of Eve," in which she compares Milton to Paul of Tarsus, John Donne and the editors of the Geneva Bible, with the consequent conclusion that Milton is more liberal than them all. Assuming that a male supremacist interpretation of Genesis 1-3 is a "given," Ferry further asserts that

[i]n his presentation of Eve and her marriage to Adam...we have to think about what was dictated to Milton by their story in Genesis and its interpretations in the New Testament, how he shaped what he could not change, what decisions he made where some choices were allowed him.

(113)

Her rendering of the Christian religion as a monolith nevertheless runs directly counter to both the mass of historical evidence which indicates that the seventeenth century was a period marked by manifold interpretations of the Christian scriptures<sup>4</sup> and to the textual evidence from Milton's *oeuvre* which indicates that his own approach to the Old and New Testaments was less than faithful to a literalist reading.<sup>5</sup>

Even Christopher Hill, departing from his characteristic technique of documenting voices from all walks of seventeenth-century life, in his book *Milton and the English Revolution* (1977) tries to mitigate Milton's male supremacism for a modern audience by placing him alongside the patriarchally inflected words of Paul:

Posterity has forgotten that [the line 'Hee for God only, shee for God in him' (PL 4: 299)] is only a poetical version of St. Paul's 'wives submit yourselves unto your own husbands as unto

the Lord'; 'the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church.' Given Milton's assumptions, it is difficult to see how he could have rejected St. Paul's clear and explicit statements. What Milton says about the subordination of women is strictly Biblical, backed up in the *De Doctrina Christiana* by an impressive array of texts.<sup>8</sup> (117)

To argue thus, however, Hill must forget the fact that Pauline doctrine was subject to numerous interpretations in the seventeenth century--some of them, like Speght's and Fell Fox's, distinctly feminist. In fine, Hill's argument against those who would see Milton as "an austere Puritan who advocated the subordination of women" (117) is that the libertarian Milton was inevitably limited by "the male supremacy which no one [*sic*] denied" (119). In compensation, he claims that Milton's departures from this apparently universal creed demonstrate that he was a man before his time in matters of sexual politics. And, according to Hill, these supposedly significant 'departures' include Milton's oft-cited, decontextualized statement from *Tetrachordon* that "the wiser should govern the less wise, whether male or female"; the fact that he named one of his daughters after the Judge of Israel, Deborah; and his infamous doctrine of divorce (119-21).

Placing Milton in the context of the antifeminist traditions of his day is useful to a certain degree, and the work of generally meticulous scholars such as McColley and Hill is commendable. But this is only half the story. Detractors of Milton as an undeniable and undeviating misogynist may agitate to have him banned from the curriculum.<sup>7</sup> Defenders of Milton as an unequivocal supporter of liberty for all--'all what,' they rarely specify, though Milton himself did not refrain from doing so--may attempt to promote him as an "ally" and "sponsor" of the early feminist movement (Wittreich ix), and even as a feminist himself (v), by imposing in retrospect the view that seventeenth-century England was ruled by a male supremacist ideology still unrent by feminist articulation. We need not install ourselves in either camp. Rather than abandoning the works of John Milton, who was, as Percy Shelley reminds us, "a republican, and a bold inquirer into morals and religion" (Preface to *Prometheus Unbound* 982), or eliding the undeniably oppressive doctrines in his works by constructing a coherent ideology of male supremacism for seventeenth-century England, it would be much more instructive to examine Milton in his entire historical context, which would perforce include the voices of his female and feminist contemporaries and near-contemporaries--voices

such as Rachel Speght's, Katherine Chidley's, Margaret Fell Fox's, and Mary Astell's.

This resolution that our view of history needs to be guided by a perspective which includes the various voices of both women and men returns us to Walker's meditation on the canonical writer Flannery O'Connor, whose works simultaneously invigorated her with their art and vision and disempowered her by virtue of their privileged status in an exclusive literary tradition. After much deep thought, Walker determines, much as we have done, that

though the rest of America might not mind, I would never be satisfied with a segregated literature. I would have to read Zora Hurston and Flannery O'Connor, Nella Larsen and Carson McCullers, Jean Toomer and William Faulkner, before I could begin to feel *well* read at all.

(43)

In conversation with her mother, she further elaborates this view:

"I believe that the truth about any subject only comes when all the sides of the story are put together, and all their different meanings make one new one. Each writer writes the missing parts to the other writer's story. And the whole story is what I'm after." (49)

And the whole story is also what we as readers of Milton need to hear from the seventeenth-century world he inhabited. For feminist re-searchers immersed in a society still governed by patriarchal mores, this reconstructive task must needs be massive. Mrs. Walker's words to her daughter accordingly may serve as an admonition to those enthusiasts who believe that the battle against oppressive masculinist codes has been won in our world and that we are beyond feminism:

"Well, I doubt if you can ever get the *true* missing parts of anything away from the white folks [for our purposes, read menfolk]...., they've sat on the truth so long by now they've mashed the life out of it." (49)

Moreover, also essential to acknowledge is one's rage against the injustices of a prejudiced society, as Walker does in her ongoing struggle with a racist tradition which did not merely deny black American artists a place in the cultural canon of their nation but imposed material conditions onto the lives of the black American people that militated against most of them ever achieving a voice. Travelling to the O'Connor house "to learn something about [herself] in relation to Flannery O'Connor," Walker discovers that

What I feel at the moment of knocking is fury that someone is paid to take care of her house, though no one lives in it, and that her house still, in fact, stands, while mine--which of course we never owned anyway--is slowly rotting into dust. Her house becomes--in an instant--the symbol of my own disinheritance, and for that instant I hate her guts.

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I think: I would level this country with the sweep of my hand, if I could. (57, 58)

Knowing that the sort of male supremacist ideas Milton espoused similarly militated against most of the females of his time and place ever achieving a voice, we too may experience this type of violent reaction when confronted by the enduring icon a dominating masculinist tradition has made of him. When reading Milton we certainly must remember his daughters, about whom his nephew Edward Phillips complacently comments

[i]t had been happy indeed if the daughters of such a person had been made in some measure inheritrixes of their father's learning; but since fate otherwise decreed, the greatest honor that can be ascribed to this now living (and so would have been to the others had they lived) is



to be a daughter to a man of his extraordinary character. (1037)

And we must also remember their daughters and granddaughters, who did not achieve the civil liberties Milton believed were the natural inheritance of freeborn men until well into the twentieth century.<sup>8</sup> Christopher Hill's suggestion that Milton "is not the only man of genius to exploit others in order to create what he had to create" is clearly inadequate as a response to such inequities (143).

But let us continue to read Milton for the power of his poetry and the promise of his libertarian, albeit limited, vision. We can leave aside the futile debate over whether or not he is a proto-feminist or a misogynist, an ally of women or an enemy--a debate much like that of the philosophical devils in Pandemonium who "found no end, in wand'ring mazes lost" (PL 2: 561). Milton, who repeatedly asserts his unambiguously male supremacist stance throughout his writings, settled this question long ago. As feminist readers of the patriarch Milton, let us then learn from Alice Walker's experience as a black American reader of works born out of a white supremacist society:

The magic, the wit, and the mystery of Flannery O'Connor I know and I will always love, I also

know the meaning of the expression "Take what you can use and let the rest rot." If ever there was an expression designed to protect the health of the spirit, this is it. (59)

To protect the health of our spirits, we therefore must analyze Milton's texts with vigilance and suspicion, recognize his valuable libertarian insights, and discard his inimical male supremacism. So doing, we will be able to mediate his political and poetical works with a more broadly expansive egalitarian vision than he allowed himself to imagine. Thus mediated, Milton may become one of those many voices that make up the multifaceted structure of seventeenth-century thought which we seek to reconstruct.

### Notes to Chapter One

<sup>1</sup>Cf. PL 4: 20 and PL 9: 467.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. PL 12: 646-47.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. PL 1: 106-08.

<sup>4</sup>Jane Dunn (*Moon in Eclipse* [1978]) discusses the influence of Wollstonecraft's thought on her daughter, Mary Shelley. Ellen Moers ("Vindicating Mary Wollstonecraft" [1976]) and Irene Tayler and Gina Luria ("Gender and Genre" [1977]) discuss her influence on Percy Shelley.

<sup>5</sup>Cf. PL 8: 383-84.

<sup>6</sup>Cf. *Def 2* [Hughes] 826.

<sup>7</sup>See *TKM* CM 5: 18-19. See also *Def 2* [Hughes] 821 for the distinction Milton draws between a true king and a tyrant.

<sup>8</sup>All my references to the Bible will be from the King James version.

<sup>9</sup>See Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down* (1972), for a broad survey of the diverse attitudes and approaches to the Christian scriptures in Milton's era. Also see James Grantham Turner's *One Flesh: Paradisal Marriage and Sexual Relations in the Age of Milton* (1987).

<sup>10</sup>Note that this tendency is still operative in the discourse of twentieth-century liberal feminist theologians who want to use the texts of the Christian tradition for their own libertarian projects. For

instance, see Phyllis Tribble's *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (1978) and Mieke Bal's "Sexuality, Sin, and Sorrow: The Emergence of the Female Character (A Reading of Genesis 1-3)" (1985). Mary Nyquist nicely points out the limitations of this profoundly ahistorical approach in "The Genesis of Gendered Subjectivity in the Divorce Tracts and in *Paradise Lost*" (1987) and "Gynesis, Genesis, Exegesis, and the Formation of Milton's Eve" (1987).

<sup>11</sup>Patricia Higgins suggests that the women's petition was composed by Katherine Chidley, a prominent member of the Leveller sect and a founder of a Separatist church.

<sup>12</sup>Arthur Barker in *Milton and the Puritan Dilemma: 1641-1660* (1942) claims that these are a reflection of Milton's marital difficulties with his estranged wife, Mary Powell, and her royalist family (66-67). That Milton was reacting to the increasing incidence of vocal female and feminist protest in the mid-seventeenth century is an equally compelling argument, however.

<sup>13</sup>Cf. Fell Fox's historical relativism in *Womens Speaking Justified* (1667).

<sup>14</sup>Mary Astell in *Some Reflections Upon Marriage* (1700) also speaks of the illogic of switching metaphors in this manner:

but when we suppose that over which we have  
Dominion to be made purely for our sakes, we

draw a false Conclusion, as he who shou'd say  
the People were made for the Prince who is set  
over them, wou'd be thought to be out of his  
Senses as well as Politicks. (50)

<sup>15</sup>See Hill, *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England* (1964), 455-63.

<sup>16</sup>Maira Ferguson's articulation of the various modes of written feminist protest is very useful in this context. According to Ferguson, feminism in the first place consists of "those ideas and actions that advocate women's just demands and rights, or that counter or offset, at any level, the socio-cultural, sexual, and psychological oppression and economic exploitation of women" (xi). Feminist polemic may then be divided into four categories: reactive polemic, which functions "to refute unsolicited misogynous attacks" (28); sustained polemic, which "calls for a change in women's condition" (28); intermittent polemic, which may be found in "the works of writers who took issue with the condition of women's lives more briefly, in passages within tracts, prefaces to works, or simply in a few poems in a volume" (30); and personal polemic, or polemic of the heart, which celebrates "love and friendship between women" (31).

<sup>17</sup>Refer to Ferguson, *First Feminists: British Women Writers (1578-1799)* (1985).

<sup>18</sup>David Aers and Bob Hodge in their article "'Rational Burning': Milton on Sex and Marriage" (1979) also argue that the homogenizing of seventeenth-century history by neo-christian critics like C.S. Lewis, Stanley Fish, C.A. Patrides, J. Halkett, and B.K. Lewalski rests on "quite unsound 'historical' and theoretical foundations" (3). Aers and Hodge's conclusion that Milton consciously did not promote orthodox pieties about the relationship between the sexes, however, is one that I will question.

<sup>19</sup>A partial list includes Aers and Hodge, 10-11; Ferry, 121; Heller, 201n9; Mollenkott, 101; Wittreich, 117; and Woods, 19.

<sup>20</sup>Cf. PL 4: 288-95; PL 8: 48-50; PL 8: 390-91; *DDD* CM, *passim*; *Apology* CM 3, i: 304-06.

<sup>21</sup>Critics who argue for Milton's intentions include Landy, Lewalski, and Wittreich.

<sup>22</sup>See Claire Cross's article, "'He-Goats Before the Flocks: A Note on the Part Played by Women in the Founding of Some Civil War Churches" (1972), where, after documenting a tradition of independent action in the faith community by seventeenth-century laywomen, she comments,

Whatever the puritan theory on the submissive place of women in society, no bushels could quench these lights. Godly women achieved so much influence in certain churches during the

Civil War period not so much because of the revolutionary nature of the times as because the whole tradition of puritan practice for at least the previous century had been preparing them for such action. (202)

<sup>23</sup>Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza uses this theoretical paradigm in *Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (1984). According to Fiorenza,

*Patriarchy* as a male pyramid of graded subordinations and exploitations specifies women's oppression in terms of the class, race, country, or religion of the men to whom we "belong." This definition of patriarchy enables us to use it as a basic heuristic concept for feminist analysis, one that allows us to conceptualize not only sexism but also racism, property-class relationships, and all other forms of exploitation or dehumanization as basic structures of women's oppression. (xiv)

<sup>24</sup>Refer to Mollenkott (100), Hill (*MltRev* 117-21), Lewalski (11), Woods (29). See also Belsey, *Critical Practice* (1980), for a discussion of 'common-sense' as an ideological tool which mystifies the constructed condition of cultural discourse.

<sup>25</sup>Fiorenza's feminist hermeneutics of suspicion should not be confused with the interpretative method Paul Ricoeur similarly labels the 'hermeneutics of suspicion.' Following Heidegger, Ricoeur argues for a method of interpretation by which some authority impels the deluded individual to acknowledge the deep truth hidden by every day practices (for example, the class struggle as discussed by Marx or the libido as hypothesized by Freud). Fiorenza's hermeneutics of suspicion, in contrast, questions the authoritative deep meaning embedded into cultural artifacts like the Christian scriptures. According to Fiorenza,

The first and never-ending task of a hermeneutics of suspicion...is to elaborate as much as possible the patriarchal, destructive aspects and oppressive elements in the Bible. Such an interpretation must uncover not only sexist biblical language but also the oppressive language of racism, anti-Judaism, exploitation, colonialism, and militarism. An interpretation of suspicion must name the language of hate by its true name and not mystify it or explain it away. ("Will" 130).

See Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow's study *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (1982),



xvii-xix, for an overview of the Heideggerian hermeneutics of suspicion.

### Notes to Chapter Two

<sup>1</sup>Cf. *SA* 268-76; *PR* 3: 414-32; *PL* 12: 79-101; *TKM* CM 5: 1; *History* YP 5, i: 448-49.

<sup>2</sup>As I demonstrated in Chapter One, when Milton refers to the rights of freeborn men, he is speaking of males only. I therefore use the masculine pronoun pointedly, and not as a pseudo-generic. For this same reason, I also refrain from inserting the supplementary phrase "or she" into Milton's carefully worded formulations.

<sup>3</sup>See Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down* (1972), Chapters Nine and Ten.

<sup>4</sup>In *Puritanism and Revolution* (1958), Hill connects this new fiction of the autonomous social subject with the requirements of modern capitalism. According to Hill, the "desire to cut the individual free from the inherited traditions, customs, and laws of society, to set him alone to work out his personal salvation in the sight of God only, in a state of 'freedom'" is "of a piece with that individualism which the new bourgeois society created, in reaction against the corporate loyalties and customs of subordination which had united feudal society" (382).

<sup>5</sup>Significantly, this is the sort of personal policing that Foucault says marks the modern era. See *History of Sexuality: An Introduction* (1978), 58-70.

<sup>6</sup>Unless otherwise indicated, I will refer to Milton's revised 1637 edition of the *Mask Presented at Ludlow Castle*.

<sup>7</sup>For an example, see Hill, *Milton and the English Revolution* (1977), 153-54.

<sup>8</sup>Julian Lovelock (17), C.L. Barber (92), and Catherine Belsey (*Milton* 46) may be numbered among those critics who read such a plot into *Comus*.

<sup>9</sup>The double-edged sword of English bourgeois sexual doctrine was taken up by many feminists from the seventeenth century to the early twentieth century with both positive and negative results. See Perry, *The Celebrated Mary Astell* (1986), *passim*; Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem* (1983), 32-48; Easlea, *Science and Sexual Oppression* (1981), 132-36.

<sup>10</sup>Margaret Thickstun in *Fictions of the Feminine* (1988) suggests that, because the enticement *Comus* offers the Lady is displaced from having sexual intercourse with him to simply sipping from his cup, she is not explicitly tempted (see 41, n9 and 52). However, as Michel Foucault notes in his *History of Sexuality: An Introduction* (1978), in a process that gained increasing momentum in Western

culture during the seventeenth century, sex itself became diffused into sexuality. Comus's sensual enticements are thus not merely metonymies for sex, but constitute an aspect of sexuality as a whole.

<sup>11</sup>Following Homer's account in Book 10 of the *Odyssey*, the Attendant Spirit notes that he who tasted Circe's "charmed Cup" "lost his upright shape,/And downward fell into a groveling Swine" (51-53). Homer further makes explicit what the Attendant Spirit only implies: though "bodies, voices, heads, and bristles [were] all/swinish now" these unfortunates' "minds were still unchanged" (X: 264-65).

<sup>12</sup>Richard Halpern reads this appellation as the native Welshman, Comus's, attempt to protect his land and culture from the English Lady. Thus, in Halpern's opinion, "when the Lady defeats Comus, her victory is an imperial one that definitively inscribes Wales as the inferior or barbarian culture" (102). Though this sort of power struggle may be at work beneath the surface of Comus's efforts to make the Lady his Queen (*Comus* 264-65), the politics of power between the sexes is so explicitly foregrounded that it cannot be glossed over by socio-political interpretations such as Halpern's.

<sup>13</sup>Note that Luce Irigaray also applies this observation to Freud's quite similar attempt to reify women against their wishes into objects of exchange in a masculinist symbolic

economy. See Irigaray's *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1985), 133-46 ("Any Theory of the 'Subject' Has Always Been Appropriated by the 'Masculine'").

<sup>14</sup>Christopher Hill documents such Leveller doctrine in his *World Turned Upside Down* (1972). This sort of communist system, of course, need not ensure the emancipation of women from masculinist constraints. Indeed, many of the proto-communist theories of the mid-seventeenth century explicitly called for the institution of a community of women which would be shared equally among all men (again, see Hill, *WTUD*). Obviously, as long as women themselves are considered property, their share of even a communist estate will serve only to reinforce their oppression.

<sup>15</sup>Cf. Christopher Kendrick, who in "Milton and Sexuality: A Symptomatic Reading of *Comus*" (1987) reaches the same reductive conclusion using the Foucauldian theory of sexuality.

<sup>16</sup>Refer to Susan Brownmiller's *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (1975).

<sup>17</sup>In a recent article, John Creaser attempts to argue for what he considers the irrelevance of the Castlehaven scandal to *Comus*. Had Creaser focused on the irrelevance of Breasted's conclusion that the 1634 masque functioned simply as a purifying ritual for the Egerton family he would have made an important point. But since he expands

his argument to make the broad claim that the contemporary scandal amongst the Egerton kin could have had no bearing whatsoever on Milton's masque, his methodology and motives are at the very least questionable. It is significant that he concludes his article by casting doubts on the victim status of the Audley women abused by Castlehaven and his underlings (32).

<sup>18</sup>Note that the subversive, anti-aristocratic comments which Milton inserts tangentially into this masque are also assimilated by the dominating culture in the end. That is, the traditional nature rites, provisional sexual pairings and sporadic work habits of the indigenous people are repressed in favor of the ordered entertainment, institutionalized marriage and strict measure required for an increasingly rationalized mode of production. Michael Wilding examines these ambiguities and internal contradictions insightfully and elegantly in his article, "Milton's 'A Masque Presented at Ludlow Castle, 1634': Theatre and Politics on the Border" (1987). See also Christopher Hill's *Milton and the English Revolution* (1977), 47 and 89-90.

<sup>19</sup>See Calhoun's "On John Milton's *A Mask at Ludlow*" (1974), 171. Also see Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 146-52.

### Notes to Chapter Three

<sup>1</sup>Milton summarizes his Arminian tenets in the third chapter of his *Christian Doctrine*, "Of the Divine Decrees," where he states "that God decreed nothing absolutely, which he left in the power of free agents" (CM 14: 65).

<sup>2</sup>See Keith W.F. Stavely, "Satan and Arminianism in *Paradise Lost*" (1989).

<sup>3</sup>Further instances of this teleology are expressed in PL 5: 829-31; PL 7: 161; and PL 11: 44.

<sup>4</sup>See PL 2: 18-19, where Satan begins his justification of his absolute rule over the rebel angels by arguing, "Mee though just right and the fixt Laws of Heav'n/Did first create your Leader."

<sup>5</sup>See Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (31-81), where she outlines her influential theory about the power-structured relationship between the sexes that prevails in patriarchal societies.

<sup>6</sup>See Chapter One of this thesis. Also see Nyquist, "The Genesis of Gendered Subjectivity in the Divorce Tracts and in *Paradise Lost*" (1987).

<sup>7</sup>Refer to Hill, *Milton and the English Revolution* (1977), 279-84.

<sup>8</sup>See *Tetrachordon* (CM 4: 81-83), a passage which I discuss at length in Chapter One.

<sup>9</sup>As a potentially feminist reading of *Paradise Lost*, however, Grossman's analysis is utterly undermined by the masculinist post-Freudian theories upon which he bases his argument. See both Margaret Homan's *Bearing the Word* (1986), 5-29, and Alice Jardine's *Gynesis* (1985), 159-77, for a useful corrective to this sort of complacent accession to Lacanian theories of the subject.

<sup>10</sup>Note that Wollstonecraft follows this indictment of Milton by highlighting the inconsistencies in his presentation of Eve. As Wollstonecraft indicates, on the one hand, Milton renders his prototypical woman utterly and unarguably submissive to her husband's decrees (PL 4: 634-38), while on the other hand he insists that she must be equal to man in order to engage in rational fellowship with him (PL 8: 381-92).

<sup>11</sup>In her essay "The Genesis of Gendered Subjectivity in the Divorce Tracts and in *Paradise Lost*" (1987), Mary Nyquist modifies Froula's reading of Eve's surrender of personal experience to orthodoxy with a historical-ideological approach that calls into question the concept of a private female self that exists prior to patriarchal socialization (119-20). The female subjectivity of the bourgeois era that Nyquist argues Milton participates in constructing--a woman attractively immured in an increasingly sentimentalized and privatized domestic

sphere--nonetheless shares the secondary status in the general cultural economy that Froula focuses on in her study, and it is this secondariness which concerns me at this point.

<sup>12</sup>Christopher Hill in *Milton and the English Revolution* (1977) comments that "[s]ome of Milton's deepest feelings, about literature and sex as well as about religion and politics, spring from horror of idolatry." Hill further notes that "[w]hat is wrong [in Milton's estimation] is to worship the creature--a priest, a king, a queen, a woman, a parliament, a building, the Church Fathers, the Prayer Book, classical learning," or, I would add, a man (178).

<sup>13</sup>Ironically, it is Eve who after the Fall initially suggests prayer as a means of propitiating God (PL 10: 932-36). Characteristically, Adam immediately appropriates Eve's suggestion, subsequently setting himself up as the privileged petitioner (PL 10: 952-57).

#### Notes to Chapter Four

<sup>1</sup>Cf. *Areo* CM 4: 309; *Way* CM 6: 122; *CD* CM 14: 11.

<sup>2</sup>See Sigmund Freud, "The Passing of the Oedipus-Complex" (1924) in *Collected Papers*, Ed. Ernest Jones; Frederick Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884); Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (1952);



Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan* (1975); and Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering* (1978).

<sup>3</sup>Refer to CD CM 15: 183.

<sup>4</sup>I am indebted to Ashraf Rushdy for this insight.

<sup>5</sup>Ruth Kelso discusses this cultural norm in *Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance* (1956).

<sup>6</sup>In the Yale edition of Milton's prose works, Phyllis B. Tillyard translates this final phrase somewhat more provocatively: "...or last perhaps because I never showed my virility in the way these brothellers do" (YP 1: 284).

<sup>7</sup>In Milton's words, "How I wish that their asininity could be shed as easily as my femininity!" ([Hughes] 620).

<sup>8</sup>See CD CM 15: 37, 39, 41, 43, 45 for Milton's doctrine of the gendered soul.

<sup>9</sup>See Allen, 192; Fish, 226; Huntley 135; Heller 200; Johnson, 161; Radzinowicz, 202; and Weinkauff 147 for a representative sampling of this view.

<sup>10</sup>Cf. lines 49-52, 234-36, 379, and 490-500.

<sup>11</sup>See, for instance, Allen, 188; Fish, 211; and Stein, 67.

<sup>12</sup>Jackie Di Salvo also addresses the issue of Samson's inner 'femininity' in her article "Intestine Thorn: Samson's Struggle with the Woman Within" (1988). Using a Chodorovian scheme, she argues that "in Samson's betrayal by an enemy woman, Milton has also dramatized the horror of woman as enemy, moreover, 'far within defensive arms,'

within the agon of masculine identity itself" (211). However, DiSalvo's reading, though elegantly rendered, is profoundly ahistorical. Chodorow clearly indicates in *The Reproduction of Mothering* (1978) that her re-vision of the oedipal paradigm, like the oedipal paradigm itself, is neither transhistorical nor transcultural. And she particularly points out that in the early modern period over two centuries ago "mothering did not dominate women's lives." Instead, during this era "the household was the major productive unit of society." In consequence, a "woman carried out her child-care responsibilities along with a wide range of other productive work" and children "were integrated early into the adult world of work" (4). The dynamics of the nuclear family which underlie the oedipus complex simply were not a prevalent force in the seventeenth-century. (Both Clark, *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century* [1919] and Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* [1977] amply document this observation.) Thus, whether Milton's Samson is an ancient Hebrew or a seventeenth-century patriarch--and the latter is most likely--the application of Chodorow's theory to his situation is inappropriate. In short, DiSalvo's Chodorovian reading of *Samson Agonistes* fails because it emphasizes the psychoanalytical at the

expense of the sociological in what Chodorow presents as a socio-psychoanalytic theory.

<sup>13</sup>That is, when consulting with Satan in *Paradise Regained* over the most efficient way to tempt Jesus, Belial shifts Solomon's responsibility for his idolatry onto Solomon's wives (PR 2: 170-71). Further exacerbating this tendency to blame women for the results of a male's desire, Satan follows his lengthy list of nymphs whom Belial and his cronies have raped by commenting that

...among the Sons of Men,  
How many have with a smile made small account  
Of beauty and *her lures*, easily scorn'd  
All *her assaults*, on worthier things intent?  
(PR 2: 192-95; my italics)

Mary Daly in *Gyn/Ecology* (1978) identifies this sort of reversal as one of the "male methods of mystification" whereby the specious morality of male supremacist doctrine is masked in patriarchal cultures (8).

<sup>14</sup>Note John C. Ulreich, Jr.'s chivalric defense of Dalila, "'Incident to All Our Sex': The Tragedy of Dalila" (1988), runs counter to my own reading of her act as blameworthy. My argument is instead with those who would generalize from the evidence of one woman's culpable act to an overall law that predicts all women will inevitably act thus.

<sup>15</sup>DiSalvo, 224; Willis, 122; and Spencer, 98, number among those critics who assume that Samson is a misogynist on the basis of his response to Dalila.

<sup>16</sup>Cf. Woodbridge, *Women and the English Renaissance* (1984), *passim*, and Rogers, *The Troublesome Helpmate* (1966), 100-59.

<sup>17</sup>See Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (1977), 91-246.

<sup>18</sup>Refer to Clark, *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century* (1919).

<sup>19</sup>Cf. *Colasterion*, Milton's final divorce tract, where he similarly declares that "a conversing solace, & peacefull society is the prime end of marriage" (CM 4: 253).

<sup>20</sup>Both Weinkauff (145-46) and Crump (1) suggest that, in Weinkauff's words, "Milton's audience with its hindsight knew which side God was on."

<sup>21</sup>Refer to Milton's *CD* CM 16: 327.

<sup>22</sup>See Homans (9), where she points out that Lacan's oedipal narrative depends on "a disingenuous confusion of trope and material condition." That is, phallus comes to signify penis. Also see Jardine, *Gynesis* (1985), 164.

#### Notes to Chapter Five

<sup>1</sup>In "Textual Overlapping and Dalilah's Harlot-Lap" (1986), Nyquist makes the point that the intelligibility a

masculinist critical tradition imposes on a text such as *Paradise Lost* cannot be neatly severed from the text's allusive unintelligibility. That is, the presuppositions of such a text may well allow for the delimitation of its meaning by a strict masculinist reading. On the other hand, the range of possibilities of meaning it displays through "the constituents of the discursive practices which it presupposes" may also prepare the way for a reading which upsets the dominating masculinist critical authority (342). Critical discourse thus may function potentially as "the unacknowledged fourth partner in the work of saving the text" (368).

<sup>2</sup>As Alice Walker points out in her essay "One Child of One's Own" (1979), the use of the term 'women' in this sense actually serves to foster yet another pseudo-generic: that is, 'women' here signifies, implicitly and insidiously, white, middle-class women only.

<sup>3</sup>The terms "feminist critique" and "gynocriticism" are Showalter's. See her "Towards a Feminist Poetics" in *The New Feminist Criticism* (1985).

<sup>4</sup>See Christopher Hill's *The World Turned Upside Down* (1972) for a far fuller and much more sophisticated analysis of the manifold seventeenth-century attitudes and approaches to the Christian scriptures than Ferry brings to bear in her argument.

<sup>5</sup>Cf. R. Kenneth Kirby's "Milton's Biblical Hermeneutics in *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*" (1984) and Mary Nyquist's "The Genesis of Gendered Subjectivity in the Divorce Tracts and in *Paradise Lost*" (1987).

<sup>6</sup>Hill is anticipated in his assumption that *Paradise Lost* 4: 289 is simply Pauline doctrine put into pentameter by Northrop Frye, *The Return of Eden* (1965), 62.

<sup>7</sup>Virginia Mollenkott and Stephanie Demetrakopoulos address such sorts in the articles "Milton and Women's Liberation: A Note on Teaching Method" (1973) and "Eve as Circean and Courtly Fatal Woman" (1975), respectively.

<sup>8</sup>Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and *Three Guineas* (1938) are both useful references on this point.

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