

nor could the Muse defend / Her Son." But women in the epic can also be a strong source of protection from just such dispersal and loss. By the poet's own account, it is a figure both womanly and divine who shelters the epic narrator of *Paradise Lost* from a fate like that of Orpheus: thou, O sister of Wisdom, Urania, wilt defend thy Son, "For thou art Heavn'ly," while the muse of Orpheus is but "an empty dream" (7.36–39).

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Milton Studies, vol 51, ed. Laura L. Knoppers
(Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne Univ. Press, 2010)

Drama in the Epic Style: Narrator, Muse, and Audience in *Paradise Lost*

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Milton's generic choices have usually been understood as constructing a Virgilian career arc: from pastoral to classical epic. Yet Milton concludes his poetic career with *Samson Agonistes*, a tragedy or "Dramatic Poem."¹ And *Paradise Lost* itself continually challenges and rewrites the classical epic. Indeed, Milton began *Paradise Lost* as a play, trying at least five times to shape the material dramatically. When he decided instead to write the story of the Fall as an epic, he folded within it his dramatic concepts.² Out of the generative tension between epic and drama emerges its modal progeny, Milton's ancient-modern epic-dramatic poem.³ *Paradise Lost* molds epic into a dramatic poem to be performed by readers in a vernacular print culture.

For a number of years, however, drama and *Paradise Lost* have parted critical company. Early responses to *Paradise Lost* certainly understood its potential as a drama — in 1674 John Dryden adapted the poem into a five-act, rhymed opera, and Andrew Marvell mocked Dryden's folly but summoned the tragedy of Samson as the

epic's shadow text. Samuel Johnson, who called Milton's *Maske* a "drama in the epick style," thought that Milton developed *Paradise Lost* out of the innovations of the *Maske*, elaborating the concept of "drama in the epick style" "with greater extent."⁴ Notable editors like Thomas Newton in the mid-eighteenth century and A. W. Verity at the beginning of the twentieth century recorded Milton's many allusions to Greek tragedy and to Shakespeare's plays, and throughout much of the twentieth century, a significant body of criticism asserted that Milton used elements of drama in creating *Paradise Lost*.⁵

But in 1963, Anne Ferry signaled a sharp turn away from discussing the poem in terms of drama either as praise or blame.⁶ While acknowledging the importance of drama for Milton, Ferry reacted strongly against the use of "dramatic" as an impressionistic catch-all description of *Paradise Lost*. In a way, Ferry was defending Milton's reputation from the long-reigning orthodoxy of new criticism. T. S. Eliot and F. R. Leavis had condemned Milton for what they characterized as his sonorous, portentous language, which they contrasted sharply with Shakespeare's dialogue and with Donne's colloquial, idiosyncratic poetic speakers. Milton's poetry might be mesmerizing, according to Eliot, but it was never theatrical; it lulled readers into unthinking acquiescence rather than forcing them to grapple with a speaker's self-dramatizing interiority. Ferry's response both to dismissals of New Criticism and to vague, countering notions of Milton's dramatic sensibilities was to posit a top-down theory of control deployed by the narrator, an argument that produced a sense of the poem as a unified epic. Granting the narrator interpretive control entailed denying the reader anything but a highly mediated relationship to characters or events, however. And in his landmark reading, 1967's *Surprised by Sin*, Stanley Fish went beyond the narrator to argue for a controlling authorial presence who managed all possible responses with a godlike foreknowledge of readerly weaknesses.⁷

Intentionally or not, by arguing that the Christian epic poet controls every aspect of *Paradise Lost*, Ferry and Fish obscured the dramatic components of Milton's poetry.⁸ Yet the epic pointedly

conjoins strong dramatic elements. And the character of God himself makes clear in *Paradise Lost* that the free agency of the audience is fundamental to the creation of energy and meaning. From both classical and English drama, Milton borrows a series of theatrical practices: characters who speak from hidden motivation, appearances that can deceive, and collaboration with an audience whose give-and-take drives the performance.

We can test the importance of drama in *Paradise Lost* by considering the first strong epic markers in the poem, the figures of the narrator and the muse he invokes. How can these epic elements function in a dramatic poem? In influential discussions of *Paradise Lost*, much has been said about the inspired epic narrator or "blind bard," mortal like us but also divinely inspired, our sole guide through the poem, the interpretive prism of everything in *Paradise Lost*.⁹ But to cede such unquestioned authority to the narrator violates the most important principle of Milton's poetics. Milton deliberately makes his poem unstable, full of necessary choice at fundamental levels—a constant choice even about how far we can trust the narrator and his guide. The narrator is a character. He acts out the speeches of other characters and in so doing, like any good actor, becomes them for a time. And the muse, the narrator's source of inspiration, is a kind of ghostly character as well. Indeed, in classical and early modern theory and practice, epic and drama, particularly tragedy, are not clearly separable. By considering the framing premise of *Paradise Lost* in terms of dramatic traditions that were clearly very important to Milton, we can appreciate anew the poem's interpretive challenges and the richly various experiences it has elicited over centuries.

1. Seventeenth Century Dramatic Poetry

Literary history conventionally considers Milton a belated Renaissance writer who was an incongruous, albeit brilliant, anomaly during his own lifetime. In truth, however, Milton's literary choices were politically engaged and in active dialogue with his contemporaries. While certainly a deeply literate student of the past,

Milton was also intensely a man of his historical moment, a moment when custom and tradition were under fierce scrutiny, liable to be considered superstition rather than truth. Even as it folds within itself innumerable allusions to classical precedents, Milton's epic is consciously modern. Milton wrote *Paradise Lost* with the intention that it move directly into an exploding print culture (both Tasso and Spenser, on the other hand, circulated their epic poems in manuscript before choosing or, in Tasso's case, being forced into print). And Milton's formal choices, including blank verse and the framing trope of inspiration, are as political as they are artistic (or religious).

Milton entered the major phase of his literary career at a moment when established genres, like epic, were beginning to seem outmoded, and newer, hybrid genres, like tragicomedy and opera, were roiling critical waters. At midcentury, William Davenant, unofficial poet laureate before the war and licensed theatrical impresario after, drew a bold line between what he regarded as the dead past and living modernity. Davenant rejected romance epics like Tasso's because they "continue and increase the melancholy mistakes of the People" and rejected allegorical epics like Spenser's as "painted History... by which wee are much less inform'd then by actions on the Stage."¹⁰ Instead, Davenant asserted that he could not "discerne by any help from reading, or learned men, ... that any Nation hath in representment of great actions (either by *Heroicks* or *Dramaticks*) digested Story into so pleasant and instructive a method as the English by their *Drama*."¹¹ Davenant's *Preface to Gondibert* proposed, therefore, a modern, English innovation, the dramatic epic poem, a hybridized form that could speak to a fractured nation and difficult times. *Gondibert* itself is an incomplete attempt at this mixed form.¹² Davenant and his interlocutor, Thomas Hobbes, are only two among many seventeenth century cultural critics who were engaging in a wide-ranging and serious debate about literary forms, especially verse and drama. Dryden, whose Restoration heroic tragedies in couplets attempt an epic-dramatic innovation from the angle of the stage, is a particularly acute commentator. His 1668 *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, itself

written as dialogue, makes wittily clear that form matters and that formal choices will shape the English future. Dryden was not explicitly attuned, however, to the significance of reading as opposed to watching drama performed.¹³ Milton, on the other hand, turned the full force of his dramatic ambitions to poetry and to the page.

As print culture expanded in the seventeenth century, one striking mode of reading shifted from the disreputable periphery to cultural and political centrality—the private reading of play texts. Works appearing as printed play texts ranged from cheap quarto editions of London plays to Ben Jonson's magisterial *Works* or the posthumous Folio editions of Shakespeare.¹⁴ The surge of stage texts moving into print caused concern for a variety of reasons. Printed plays were, in some instances, dismissed as ephemera, a waste of space and paper. Thomas Bodley famously lumped play texts together with "Almanackes... & proclamations" as "idle bookes, & riffe raffes," not worth a place in his library.¹⁵ William Prynne also objected to wasting precious paper on printed plays, although he suspected play reading to be not simply a waste of time but a degenerative influence on moral standards. As Heidi Brayman Hackel demonstrates, however, play texts were indeed part of many book collections, soon enough finding their way into the Bodleian as well, in spite of Bodley's nervous prohibitions.¹⁶

A pervasive strategy for legitimating play texts in print was to call them poems. When it praises the "Book" ("On Shakespeare," 11) of that "Admirable Dramatick Poet," Milton's "On Shakespeare" participates in a generic metamorphosis that had become, by 1632, a minor convention.¹⁷ In 1608, for example, Jonson commiserated with John Fletcher over the failure of his *Faithful Shepherdess*, done in by what Jonson calls, with savage sarcasm, "The wise, and many-headed *Bench*, that sits / Upon the Life, and Death of *Playes*."¹⁸ Jonson assures Fletcher that "thy murdred Poëme... shall rise / A glorified worke in Time, when Fire, / Or moathes shall eate, what all these Fooles admire" (14–16). Jonson himself endured the theatrical failure of *The New Inn* in 1629. In the wake of this public humiliation Jonson rejected "the loathed stage" and its patchwork spectacles when he published the play in 1631.¹⁹

Renaming a play a dramatic poem implies that a certain class of drama is too elevated or intellectual to be appreciated by the crude spectators of stage performance. It must therefore be printed for a refined reading audience.²⁰ The address to the prospective reader in the 1609 publication of Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, for example, glorifies the printed play text precisely because it was "never staled with the stage, never clapper-clawed with the palms of the vulgar."²¹ This play, the advertisement urges, requires the work of the "Ever Reader," someone discerning and educated who can appreciate a play that "deserves such a labor as well as the best comedy in Terence or Plautus." Since the comedies of Terence and Plautus are standard schoolboy fare in the early modern period, "Ever Reader" implies that when Shakespeare's play moves into print it will circulate safely in the confined domain of those with humanist training.²²

Yet reclassifying a play as a poem failed to neutralize the charged and open-ended threat that plays seemed to present even in print. Greek tragedy, for example, was rarely published in English before or during the seventeenth century. Only the highly educated who could read Latin (and the few who could read Greek) were able to read Euripides, Aeschylus, and Sophocles in the early and mid-seventeenth century. It may, at first, seem odd that Greek tragedy had not been published in English earlier. Hobbes provides at least a partial answer in *Leviathan's* chapter on "The Liberty of Subjects" where he blames classical education for contributing to the English revolution: "there was never any thing so deerly bought, as these Western parts have bought the learning of the Greek and Latine tongues."²³ Greek tragedies that dramatized individual freedom and contemptible tyranny would surely have been part of what Hobbes regarded as dangerous learning.

Familiarity with Greek tragedy could, of course, be deployed by many sides. In 1649, for example, Christopher Wase translated Sophocles's *Electra* as a pointed encouragement that Charles's children reclaim their birthright through war.²⁴ Published in the Hague, Wase's royalist translation of Sophocles was then sold in London by Humphrey Moseley. Turning the pages of Thomason's

copy of *Electra... presented to Her Highnesse the Lady Elizabeth* allows us to see, in a matter of a few pages, the complexity of the cultural battlefield. Wase adds two epilogues "Shewing the Parallell" of his modern dress translation to the current political crisis. Each epilogue explores marriage as a political metaphor and the first explicitly attacks Milton for his position on divorce.²⁵ In Humphrey Moseley's edition, directly following the epilogue, is bound an advertisement of Moseley's publications, including *The Poems of Mr John Milton, with a Masque presented at Ludlow Castle*. Milton's cultural position is manifestly complex, both yoked with and alienated from Greek tragedy. Like so many areas of print culture, the claim to classical learning was a battlefield. Nicholas McDowell has, for example, traced the patronage circle Thomas Stanley created in the 1640s and 1650s to foster classical learning as a royalist defense during unfriendly times, work perhaps most impressively fulfilled by Stanley's own Greek-Latin edition of Aeschylus in 1663.²⁶ To lose Greek tragedy to the royalist camp and their claims of beleaguered learning and scholarship would have felt to Milton a devastatingly unfair defeat. In his brief essay introducing *Samson Agonistes* in 1671, "Of that Sort of Dramatic Poem which is Call'd Tragedy," Milton's defiant turn to "Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, the Three Tragic Poets unequal'd yet by any" is a countermove in the culture wars, claiming not only these ancient authorities but also high culture, including drama, as his own.

Polarities between ancient and modern, educated and vulgar, moral instruction and corruption structured a debate about drama that was in many ways also about national identity. The freewheeling power of Shakespeare's plays, the neoclassicism of Jonson, and the outrageous inventiveness of Beaumont and Fletcher provided authentic English literary precedents. Except for Jonson, however, the greatest English dramatists disregarded classical rules of generic decorum, embarrassing critics who feared that English culture could seem naïve, even uncouth. All these controversies—moral, aesthetic, national—were further enflamed and politicized by Parliament's closure of the theaters for 18 years.

For a country that had closed its theaters, Plato and Aristotle's ancient disagreement about poets in the commonwealth had topical urgency. In writing *Paradise Lost* Milton would have been particularly aware of Plato's adamant rejection of epic poetry because the epic speaker impersonates characters dramatically. Yet Milton also knew Aristotle's argument that tragedy contained and surpassed epic. If certain audiences and performances incited antitheatrical fears (either in ancient Greece or Puritan England), Aristotle offered a countervailing emphasis on reading plays, rather than seeing them performed. In *Paradise Lost* Milton builds on Aristotle's theory that tragedy could effect its catharsis at least as powerfully in reading as it does on stage. Milton had the additional and powerful precedent of the book of Revelation, because he was convinced by "the grave authority of Paraeus"²⁷ that Revelation is "a *Propheticall Drama*, show, or representation" meant for "the mindes of the Readers."²⁸ Prompted by Aristotle, Pareus, and his own strong inclination toward drama, Milton collaborates with his audience to produce the difficult and sometimes treacherous work of dramatic reading—reading that requires us to be not only audience but actors. *Paradise Lost's* use of blank verse, its compelling public speeches, and its extensive passages of dialogue and soliloquy are, in other words, deliberate invitations. The dramatic elements of *Paradise Lost* extend beyond occasional interpolated speeches or isolated scenes; the charge of reading a drama is placed upon the reader from the poem's first words.

2. Dramatic Narrator

Paradise Lost's astonishing first sentence boldly asserts the poem's religious intent and its debts to the epic genre:

Of Man's First Disobedience, and the Fruit
Of that Forbidden Tree, whose mortal taste
Brought Death into the World, and all our woe,
With loss of *Eden*, till one greater Man
Restore us, and regain the blissful Seat,
Sing Heav'nly Muse, that on the secret top
Of *Oreb*, or of *Sinai*, didst inspire

That Shepherd, who first taught the chosen Seed,
In the Beginning how the Heav'ns and Earth
Rose out of *Chaos*: Or if *Sion* Hill
Delight thee more, and *Siloa's* Brook that flow'd
Fast by the Oracle of God; I thence
Invoke thy aid to my advent'rous Song,
That with no middle flight intends to soar
Above th' *Aonian* Mount, while it pursues
Things unattempted yet in Prose or Rhyme. (PL 1.1–16)

The strong, challenging voice speaking these lines forces our fascinated attention as surely as it demands the attention of the Muse. This character deliberately recalls the singers of Homer and Virgil's epics. At the same time, the epic associations of the narrator of *Paradise Lost* are part of his role as dramatic narrator.

Plato recognized that, even if they were performed by one singer, epics are deeply imbued with the dramatic, especially when the epic narrator assumes the voice of a character speaking in the first person. It is this element of impersonation in the performance of epic that Plato wanted to extricate from education and even from his republic and that led him finally to banish poetry altogether.²⁹ Aristotle agreed—but without censure—that epic and tragedy are intertwined genres. In the *Poetics* Aristotle argues forcefully that Greek tragedy was based on the epic and that it surpassed it. The aspect Aristotle most admires in Homer's epics, for example, is precisely its embedded dramatic moments. With the development of tragedy, a "higher form of art" emerges, a form that goes beyond its source: "All the parts of an epic are included in Tragedy; but those of Tragedy are not all of them to be found in the Epic."³⁰ Aristotle's critical precedent was important for Milton, but it also challenged him to go beyond Aristotle's cryptic paradox. Milton had begun his epic poem as a tragedy, that "gravest, moralest, and most profitable of all other Poems," and in changing it to epic form he does not reduce or subtract the tragic elements.³¹ Rather, Milton utilizes the full force of both genres in *Paradise Lost*—even in that most conventional of epic components, the narrator. *Paradise Lost's* narrator is much more than a conduit. He is a fabulous character—almost satanic in his epic ambition, touching in his

blindness, theatrical in his ability to voice different characters, human in his fears and malleability.

To deepen and complicate the convention of the epic narrator, Milton builds upon two closely linked dramatic devices: the framing presenter and the chorus. Milton had used both devices already in all his drafts for a dramatic version of the Fall. Milton reuses everything from his early dramatic sketches, one way or the other, for *Paradise Lost*, including his key notion of the prologue figure—but instead of Michael or Moses or Gabriel, the role of overarching narrator belongs to a character we might call “Milton” or the “Poet.” By using the character of the epic narrator, fallen man speaking to a fallen audience, *Paradise Lost* is able to “tell / Of things invisible to mortal sight” (3.54–55). But we must hear this story from a character we assume has been granted his wish to “see” the unseeable (3.54).

The character of the narrator had challenged Milton’s thinking for a long time. In working through ideas for a tragedy in paradise in the early 1640s, Milton could not solve the logical problem of how an audience of fallen people at a staged play could “see Adam in this state of innocence by reason of thier sin,” no matter what prologue figure he tried.³² In *Paradise Lost*, Gabriel becomes an actor. Michael retains his role as narrator, explaining human history to fallen Adam at the end of the poem. Moses was the dramatic narrator Milton had considered tentatively for the second version of his manuscript plans for a drama of the Fall, and certainly for the third, where Moses would “προλογιζει” (speak a prologue) (YP 8:544). In *Paradise Lost*, however, Moses must be relegated to the role of a character in Michael’s narration since he is a figure in Old Testament history and therefore cannot be part of the poem’s narrative structure. Instead, the narrator of *Paradise Lost* seeks to assume Moses’ role himself, asking the Muse to inspire him as she had inspired Moses, “That Shepherd, who first taught the chosen Seed, / In the Beginning how the Heav’ns and Earth / Rose out of Chaos” (PL 1.8–10). Although this is rarely remarked upon, the one other possible narrator in Milton’s early thinking is Lucifer, who in “Adam unparadiz’d” appears “relating, & insulting in what he

had don to the destruction of man” (YP 8:560). In *Paradise Lost*, of course, the job of telling that story falls to the epic narrator both as explainer and as the actor who speaks in Satan’s voice.

In the Trinity manuscript, each of the four dramatic versions of what would become *Paradise Lost* also includes a Chorus, and that Chorus plays an increasingly important role as the play takes shape in Milton’s successive drafts. A chorus of angels is listed in the first two drafts. In the third version, the Chorus closes each of the play’s five acts: singing “a hymne of ye creation”; singing “the marriage song and describ[ing] Paradiſe”; “fear[ing] for Adam and relat[ing] Lucifers rebellion and fall”; “bewail[ing]” “the good Adam hath lost”; and “breifly conclud[ing]” (YP 8:554). In “Adam Unparadized” the Chorus is more fully integrated into the action. Again the Chorus serves a narrative function, telling the story of the angels’ fall and describing the creation of Adam and Eve, as well as the battle and victory in heaven. But the Chorus also gets ready to fight Satan, and it speaks directly to Adam and tells him he should repent.

In *Paradise Lost*, the vast culmination of Milton’s earlier sketches, some of the functions of the Chorus are enacted by the angelic choir or by individual angels, but much of the Chorus’s role is transferred to the epic narrator.³³ That connection between Chorus and narrator goes deep in literary history and in Milton’s own thinking about drama. In *The Reason of Church-Government*, Milton’s examples of scriptural drama include “the Apocalypse of St. John.” Revelation is particularly intriguing as a Miltonic precedent since it is given to us by a narrator who has received his vision from a heavenly messenger. Milton calls Revelation “the majestic image of a high and stately tragedy, shutting up and intermingling her solemn scenes and acts with a sevenfold chorus of hallelujahs and harping symphonies,” and he cites as confirmation of “my opinion” on the dramatic structure of Revelation the authority of David Pareus.³⁴ In his *Commentary on the Revelation*, Pareus argues not only that the book is a tragedy but also that John’s internal visionary theater becomes a drama of reading, “a *Propheticall Drama*, show, or representation” meant for “the mindes of the

Readers."³⁵ Crucial to the scenic and suspenseful dramatic nature of John's imparted vision is the heavenly chorus. In addition to "diverse persons one after another" who "come upon the Theater to represent things done, and so again depart: diverse Chores also or Companies of Musicians and Harpers distinguish the diversity of the Acts, and while the Actors hold up, do with musically accord sweeten the weariness of the Spectators, and keep them in attention." In Pareus's description of inspired tragedy, the Chorus is the structural element that holds together the actors who "represent things done."³⁶

While choruses of hymning angels do figure in *Paradise Lost*, much of the conventional burden of the Chorus is assumed by the narrator. In shifting his generic frame from representation arranged in acts to a continuous dramatic poem Milton relies on the narrator to frame the actors within the poem, to break the action and to keep us "in attention." In touching ways, the narrator of *Paradise Lost* seems to yearn to join the choirs of angels, at times allowing his narrative role to dissolve into their song.³⁷ He can never truly join them, however, because he is, like that bitter former chorister Satan, fallen out of their "undisturbed Song."³⁸ The narrator's role is never more affectingly displayed than at the beginning of book 4 when he wishes he could play the role of John, but realizes that he cannot:

O for that warning voice, which he who saw
Th' *Apocalypse*, heard cry in Heav'n aloud,
Then when the Dragon, put to second rout,
Came furious down to be reveng'd on men,
Woe to the inhabitants on Earth! that now,
While time was, our first Parents had been warn'd. (4.1-6)

Instead, the narrator stands alone, caught between reader and plot, especially here and in the four opening addresses we call the poem's invocations.

Revelation, the "stately tragedy" of the end of days, is, necessarily, a limited model for a poem about the beginning of time. Only in heaven can a chorus be undisturbed and undivided. Milton infuses *Paradise Lost*, therefore, with human tragedy and literary

history. The role of narrator in *Paradise Lost* draws not only upon the dramatic performance of the poet in an epic, a genre with roots deep in an oral tradition, but also on the presenter's function in theater, particularly in the English tradition.

In classical tragedy and its modern imitators, the narrator or chorus carries a complex burden—important for furthering the plot, useful for directly addressing the audience, but also problematic for its double role as both narrative-maker and commentator. Dramatic narrators and choruses have, therefore, sometimes been dismissed by critics as an orthodox drag on a play's unsettling freedom. Because choruses act as the voice of the status quo, they can indeed seem moralistic, self-righteous, and preachy. But even at their most platitudinous, choruses are enunciating beliefs that, once manifest, can be questioned. The audience must decide whether to go along with the chorus's party line or to accept the profoundly unstable position of distrusting the drama's narrative vehicle. In many Greek tragedies (and certainly in Milton's modern version of a Greek tragedy, *Samson Agonistes*), it is difficult for the audience to judge whether the chorus speaks what we are to believe or whether the chorus is the suspect voice of groupthink. In other words, the chorus or narrator may seem simply like a narrative delivery device or an authorial strategy for the control of meaning, yet they can often be construed as exactly the opposite.

The prologue or dramatic narrator—a role often played by the chorus itself—is even more defamiliarizing. Rather than pull us immediately into action, a play that begins with a prologue reminds us at once that we are crucial participants in a creative act. Whether the narrator is an author-character, one of the actors stepping outside his role to address us, or already a fictional character, the frame addresses the audience directly and invites its necessary participation.

From medieval mystery and morality plays through the early modern period, English dramatists developed the narrative and metacritical role of the prologue into a richly flexible theatrical device, one that could protect the author, cajole or mock, but that, one way or the other, asks for the audience's collaboration.³⁹ In crafting his narrator Milton could thus draw not only on the choral

conventions of Greek drama but also on a long English tradition. The practice begins early. Presenters were an important feature of English medieval drama.⁴⁰ Lucifer or Herod inaugurates many of the Corpus Christi plays (just as Satan was to have opened the dramatic version of *Paradise Lost* that Milton showed Edward Phillips). The character God often takes on this role as well. Later, morality plays further developed the convention of allowing characters from within the play to step outside and provide a framing prologue. Mercy does so for *Mankind*, a frame made all the more interesting because of the practice of doubling actors.⁴¹ The actor playing Mercy probably also played Titivillus the Great, the main demon in the play. Titivillus will only appear later if the audience applauds loudly and throws money in a collection plate, a nice theatrical precedent for the many prologues and epilogues that will demand attention and applause.⁴² It is unlikely that Milton knew *Mankind* directly, but the theatrical tradition of doubling and of vice characters and devils on stage had a long and fruitful presence in early modern theater.⁴³

John Bale's early sixteenth century plays, for example, written for a traveling theatrical company under the patronage of Thomas Cromwell, combine elements of morality plays and of humanist drama.⁴⁴ Because he saw drama as a powerful pedagogical and preaching device for Protestantism, Bale could provide a strong precedent for Milton, particularly in his creation of the author character, Baleus Prolocutor. Bale's various plays are connected by this complex, colloquial character who introduces, concludes, and offers intermittent commentary on his plays. Baleus Prolocutor is a truly liminal character—one of the actors and yet also a corrective, metatheatrical character, the Author. In his opening speech before *The Temptation of Our Lord* (1538), for example, Baleus Prolocutor underlines the point he wants the audience to "lerne":

For assaultes of Sathan lerne here the remedye;
Take the worde of God, lete that be your defence.
So wyll Christ teache yow in our next comedye;
Ernestly prent it in your quyck intelligence.⁴⁵

He can inject humor and charm and appeal to the viewers' "quyck intelligence." But he can also dictate the audience's response when

he fears the play might mislead them into siding with evil characters or might be liable to a doctrinally suspect interpretation.

Bale's energetic proselytizing did not become the dramatic norm, however.⁴⁶ In fact, a primary source of tension between cultural reformers and the theater was what its critics saw as the theater's embrace of entertainment over moral instruction. Certainly, many English plays did have serious lessons to impart, and the chorus or prologue could make those lessons clear. The Chorus of *Romeo and Juliet*, for example, steps out from the acting company to set the scene for the audience and also to announce the play's moral and political position:

Two households, both alike in dignity,
In fair Verona, where we lay our scene,
From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,
Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean. (Prologue, 1-4)

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, on the other hand, the pedestrian elements of the prologue convention are wittily acknowledged by Peter Quince's dogtrot plot summary as Prologue in "Pyramis and Thisbe." The fractured plea that begins the rude mechanical's Prologue, "If we offend, it is with our good will" (5.1.108), also acknowledges its apotropaic function and the multilayered commentary available to a discerning audience. Common on the Elizabethan stage, prologues (and epilogues) became increasingly prevalent in early Stuart drama and were nearly ubiquitous in the Restoration.⁴⁷ The Prologue to Dryden's *Rival Ladies* (1664) archly observes,

in former Days
Good *Prologues* were as scarce, as now good Plays.
For the reforming Poets of our Age,
In this first Charge, spend their Poetique rage.⁴⁸

Over the course of the seventeenth century, theatrical beginnings supplied interpretive directions and tried to deflect blame. By the Restoration, they were almost always cloaked in ironic role-playing, self-mockery, or mock hostility to the audience.

The "Epilogue" to Dryden and Davenant's adaptation of *The Tempest*, for example, concludes ruefully "That Sixty Seven's a very

damning year."⁴⁹ In that year the narrator of *Paradise Lost* warily sets himself in the Restoration milieu. The (to Milton) decidedly unfit audiences of Restoration theater haunt the narrator's fear of the "barbarous dissonance" and "savage clamor" of the "Race" "of Bacchus and his Revellers" (*PL* 7.32–36).⁵⁰ We have read the narrator's antipathy to this imagined audience as Milton's sense of exceptionalism or his fear of punishment. But the dramatic dimension of the narrator's four invocatory statements should remind us that these statements are speech acts with purposes richer and more various than we have often allowed. The narrator's persona shares the self-consciousness and the boundary-breaking role of the theatrical prologue. His fraught relationship with his audience resembles the castigation or backhanded flattery that theatrical prologues deployed to protect their work from mockers and false wits and to enlist the audience in siding with the author and participating in the play's imaginative work. In creating the narrator of *Paradise Lost* Milton uses drama as a resource—and not only the kind of drama we are comfortable associating with Milton such as Greek tragedy or Renaissance biblical plays. The English theatrical tradition, including the contemporary Restoration stage, shaped Milton's ambitions and concerns.

It is nonetheless true that English playwriting seems in unsettling conflict with the poem's religious intent. The deeply religious subject matter of *Paradise Lost* is a profound departure from the usual subjects of the stage. By the Restoration, in fact, Dryden merrily announces that prologues now call the theatrical audience to attention just as "Bells to Churches" used to call people to hear "Sermons."⁵¹ The "reforming" prologue is deliberately and deliciously critical:

you think yourselves ill us'd
When in smart Prologues you are not abus'd

.....
Your Fancy's pall'd, and liberally you pay
To have it quicken'd e're you see a Play.
Just as old Sinners worn from their delight,
Give money to be whip'd to appetite.⁵²

Like the old sinner, the audience's fancy wants a little punishment to get excited. But on the unconstrained English stage of Charles II's London, a stage that blamed its own long closure on religious extremism, religion was the last thing that would have pleased or sold. Indeed—and remarkably, given the predominance of religious material in early modern print culture—there was little precedent even in the prerevolutionary theater for religious subject matter.

When, however, religion and theater are yoked in the Elizabethan crucible of great London theater, it is in conjunction with epic. In the early 1590s George Peele and Christopher Marlowe pointedly used epic gestures, including versions of epic invocation in dramatic prologues and choral openings. Peele apparently attempted the rare feat of writing biblical drama for a public theater, a task made the more difficult by the lurid nature of his chosen story.⁵³ *The Love of David and Faire Bethsabe* is a combustible combination of drama's subversive energy and the Bible's sexual explicitness. Peele's melding of biblical drama with epic may have been an attempt to control the difficulties his subject presented, but it is equally possible that Peele used a synthesis of epic and drama to underscore the work's thrilling sexual and moral danger. Prologus (who probably then played the role of Chorus in the play) begins *The Love of David and Faire Bethsabe* by demonstrating a properly reverent respect for the play's biblical material and by trying to shepherd the audience's response away from the eroticism and political critique intrinsic in the story of David's troubling sexual life. Peele's dramatic prologue is clearly indebted to epic:

Of Israels sweetest singer now I sing,
His holy stile and happie victories,
Whose Muse was dipt in that inspiring deaw,
Arch-angels stilled from the breath of Jove,
Decking her temples with the glorious flowers,
Heavens rained on tops of Syon and Mount Synai.⁵⁴

Influenced by Guillaume du Bartas's creation epic (as Milton would be as well), Peele attempts an amalgam of epic ambition and tragedy:

Then helpe devine Adonay to conduct,
 Upon the wings of my well tempered verse,
 The hearers minds above the towers of Heaven,
 And guide them so in this thrice haughty flight,
 Their mounting feathers scorch not with the fire,
 That none can temper but thy holy hand. (16-21)

Prologus's plea to "devine Adonay" turns a blind eye to the audience's imagination, however, especially since the play that follows is lusciously sexual and politically transgressive. After Prologus's appeal to a "holy hand," he pulls back a curtain to discover Bethsabe, bathing herself and singing a hypnotically erotic song:

Hot sunne, coole fire, temperd with sweet aire,
 Black shade, fair nurse, shadow my white haire.
 Shine sun, burne fire, breathe air, and ease mee,
 Black shade, fair nurse, shroud me and please me. (24-27)

Understandably, "the hearers minds" might not be able to cooperate with Prologus's lofty thoughts.⁵⁵ A sermon might guide listeners through the erotic shoals and balance possible doubt about David's character with a stress on his repentance, but a play invites identification and has much less control over audience response. This is true whether a theatrical audience actually sees a beautiful woman bathing or a reading audience is given the charge to imagine it. The Chorus of *David and Bethsabe* invokes epic convention to call on God and to unveil a strong biblical story; the result, intentional or not, is to pull the audience into sex and sin.

Peele's attempt at staging the Bible was not emulated on the English stage. A generation later Abraham Cowley did begin an epic poem on David, but he found it impossible to complete, in part because he could see the moral and typological switch points in the story that had led Peele's play astray from moral lessoning.⁵⁶ If a biblical epic proved difficult, dramatic treatments of religious subjects must have seemed a particularly volatile choice at a moment when religious critics and theatrical practitioners were often at each other's throats. Although its ostensible purpose may be a safe pedagogic lesson, a religious story treated theatrically can invite serious moral doubt (or levity). The gaps between speeches,

the juxtapositions of scenes, the sympathetic appeal of morally compromised characters and, perhaps above all, the lack of narrative guidance make for interpretive danger. Even in a closet drama like Elizabeth Cary's *The Tragedie of Mariam*, the Chorus that ends each of the five acts is profoundly puzzling—officious, sanctimonious, and coldly out of sympathy with Mariam's plight.⁵⁷ The chorus thinks its task is instructive, but its very pomposity and conservatism split the play's meaning wide open.

The most famous early modern play that dares to stage religious crisis on a secular stage is Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*.⁵⁸ We know that Milton borrowed significantly from *Doctor Faustus* in *Paradise Lost*: for one thing, Milton's Satan echoes Mephistopheles and emulates Faustus's restless ambition and willful self-destruction. Nevertheless, criticism has been uneasy about putting the sober poet Milton in conversation with the homoerotic bad boy of the sixteenth century stage. Many aspects of Marlowe's work would indeed have worried Milton (above all else, perhaps, the clownish comic additions to *Faustus* would have deeply offended Milton's sense of decorum). But Milton's career is a series of resistances to the alienation of drama from serious inquiry, and in Marlowe, Milton could find the most explicit dramatic consideration of demonic temptation in early modern theater—a temptation to intellectual ambition on an epic scale. Its audience is guided on the astonishing journey of Faustus over space and time and the bounds of mortality by an epic Chorus.

At the level of character and metaphor, Milton built on the crisscrossing girders between his own ideas about a tragic epic and Marlowe's epic-inflected tragedy. Milton's Satan cries in defiant despair:

Farewell happy Fields
 Where Joy for ever dwells: Hail horrors, hail
 Infernal world, and thou profoundest Hell
 Receive thy new Possessor: One who brings
 A mind not to be chang'd by Place or Time.
 The mind is its own place, and in itself
 Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n. (PL 1.249-55)

Before *Paradise Lost*, Marlowe's Mephistopheles had cried out when Faustus asks, "How comes it then that thou art out of hell?":

Why, this is hell, not am I out of it.
Think'st thou that I, who saw the face of God
And tasted the eternal joys of heaven,
Am not tormented with ten thousand hells
In being deprived of everlasting bliss?⁵⁹

Even as he tries to warn Faustus of his folly, Mephistopheles ends with a sibilant joke at his own demonic expense. The Chorus makes this onomatopoeic joke theologically strange. It had begun *Doctor Faustus* by pointing to a man who is "in his study" because "Nothing so sweet as magic is to him, / Which he prefers before his chiefest bliss" (Prologue, 26–17). This hissing bliss is a warning that Satan is afoot, perhaps, but it also presents the Christian option that Faustus rejects as chilling too—yearning for perfect heavenly happiness that comes circling round to the slithering of a snake's tail. Milton likes to pun on the serpent's hiss. Take Satan's triumphant words to his followers before they metamorphose into a writhing snake pit: "What remains, ye Gods, / But up and enter now into full bliss" (10.502–03). Milton need not have picked bliss up from Marlowe, but *Paradise Lost* is saturated with the seductive pride in brilliance and the sense of lost possibility and treachery that *Doctor Faustus* put unnervingly on stage in such powerful blank verse.

As much as *Faustus's* blank verse or its satanic characters, Milton was interested in the aesthetic and moral problems explored by Marlowe and highlighted by the play's Chorus. *Doctor Faustus* stages, for example, a split between humanist learning and submission to orthodox belief. The Chorus frames *Doctor Faustus* with religious intimations, but their precise import is brilliantly elusive. It is possible to interpret the Chorus's opening and closing remarks as orthodox.⁶⁰ In the end, for example, the Chorus leaves the stage with a warning:

Regard his hellish fall,
Whose fiendful fortune may exhort the wise

Only to wonder at unlawful things.
Whose deepness doth entice such forward wits
To practice more than heavenly power permits.

(Epilogue, 4–8)

But because Marlowe has infused the Chorus's speeches with classical markers it is difficult to hold a purely Christian message steady. When the Chorus laments, "Cut is the branch that might have grown full straight, / And burned is Apollo's laurel bough / That sometimes grew within this learned man" (Epilogue, 1–3), is it Faustus's religious heterodoxy that the Chorus mourns or his abuse of classical learning?⁶¹ After all, the final warning resonates as much with Greek tragedy as it does with Christian humility.⁶² Faustus has tried to embrace pagan beliefs and Helen of Troy, embodying the danger that humanist learning can unleash. He has dared to know more "than heavenly power permits," and the gods have punished him.

The temptation to know more than one should lies at the core of *Paradise Lost*; it destroys the human couple in paradise and roils under the narrator's confidence in the safety of his own project. The narrator's invocation of Urania at the beginning of book 7 of *Paradise Lost*, for example, interlaces classical learning and monotheism in a Marlovian negotiation that is provocative and troubling, not only for the narrator himself but for his audience. By this third invocation, any certainty we had about the identity of the narrator's muse has been fractured. Why does the narrator invoke Urania, the classical muse of astronomy, especially since we will soon experience Raphael's teasing lesson on Ptolemaic and Copernican systems and his warning not to think about astronomical questions? How can we fathom the meaning beyond the name? The narrator's unease is palpable: fear of violent retribution, fear of "wander[ing]" "forlorn," fear of abandonment or worse (PL 7.20). Orpheus was destroyed because "the Muse" could not "defend / Her Son. So fail not thou, who thee implores: / For thou art Heaven'ly, shee an empty dream" (PL 7.37–39). What are we to make of the muse he addresses, Urania, separated from her identity but at the same time understood in comparison with another

classical muse? One muse, "divine," is in some sense real; at least her "meaning" is. Orpheus's mother, Calliope, muse of epic, is "an empty dream." Distinguishing between these crucial shades of difference means negotiating treacherous ground on the part of both narrator and audience.

One final theatrical model for the narrator of *Paradise Lost* is particularly illuminating. Samuel Johnson opined mordantly that we may "very plainly" "discover . . . the dawn or twilight of *Paradise Lost*" in *A Maske Presented at Ludlow Castle*, that "drama in the epick style."⁶³ Curmudgeonly although he may be, Johnson nevertheless makes a perceptive connection between Milton's most significant theatrical work and *Paradise Lost*. In *A Maske* Milton had experimented with a disturbingly twinned narrator—the Attendant Spirit or Daemon who speaks the prologue and epilogue. Once he dons his disguise at the end of his prologue, the Spirit is also a major actor in the play, Thyrsis, an inspired artist figure whose "artful strains have oft delay'd / The huddling brook to hear his madrigal" (*A Maske*, 494–95). Milton's Spirit presents himself as a messenger sent from and speaking for the heavens, and both the Egerton family in 1634 and we, his reading audience, generally take him at face value. Yet this is a major leap of faith since the Spirit puts on and off disguises and has a disconcerting mirror relationship with the other masked musical genius of the woods, the pagan divinity Comus. In a staged production, the step of doubling the parts of Attendant Spirit and Comus would have a theatrical logic hard for a director to resist. After all, Milton's *Maske* means to teach everybody that appearances cannot be trusted and that you have to think for yourself. *A Maske* is an act of instruction for the Egerton family and a major learning experience for Milton.

Slyly, glancingly, the masque suggests that the Spirit/Presenter is a bit full of himself and can only protect the children in limited ways. The masque's humor and its refraction of the real world becomes richly self-referential and self-deprecatory when Milton adopts the Spirit's epilogue, "if Virtue feeble were, / Heav'n itself would stoop to her" (1022–23), as his own signature epithet on his travels abroad.⁶⁴ The Attendant Spirit is always an author

figure since he represents and is represented by Henry Lawes, the masque's co-creator. The Spirit also represents divine intervention, a kind of embodied messenger of inspiration. By the time Milton was traveling in Italy in the years between *A Maske's* anonymous and authorial publications, he was appropriating the Spirit's script for himself, so that the Spirit also comes to represent, at least for Milton himself, the author John Milton, public actor who harbors a private uncertainty. That character—inspired and magisterial but also isolated, brushed with the shadow of the diabolical—is richly and brilliantly developed in the figure of *Paradise Lost's* epic narrator.

3. Muse

Paradise Lost begins with a virtual torrent of blank verse, rushing down through lines, creating, all at once, statements, demands, and lacunae of cause and identity. The invocation's second sentence then slows, hesitates, and becomes intensely bodily and intimate:

And chiefly Thou O Spirit, that dost prefer
Before all Temples th' upright heart and pure,
Instruct me, for Thou know'st; Thou from the first
Wast present, and with mighty wings outspread
Dove-like satst brooding on the vast Abyss
And mad'st it pregnant: What in me is dark
Illumine, what is low raise and support;
That to the highth of this great Argument
I may assert Eternal Providence,
And justify the ways of God to men. (PL 1.17–26)

The Spirit who lives in a heart and broods over an abyss, who can make matter pregnant and flood blindness with light, who can raise "what is low" to the height of great argument, becomes the second major character to inhabit *Paradise Lost*. The Spirit muse is a provocative, potentially dangerous character—the poem's wild card. It may be difficult to see now, in a literary world shaped by Milton's great example, but the relationship between the narrator of *Paradise Lost* and his muse was a challenge to the world into which the

poem was published. It was a gesture of sympathy, not only with classical poetry, but—strange bedfellows—also with the zealous Protestant brethren who had been repudiated in 1660. Contemporary derision for the classical past is evident in Davenant's sneer that Homer "often interrogates his Muse, not as his rational Spirit but as a *Familiar*, separated from his body, so her replies bring him where he spends time in immortal conversation."⁶⁵ Thomas Hobbes makes a sarcastic analogy between epic poets, on the one hand, who are, he argues, the "divines" of pagan religion invoking their pagan muse, and seventeenth century Puritan divines, on the other, who believe in the prophetic inspiration they invoke. Hobbes comes close to calling Puritan divines pagans themselves, or renegade Christians like Faust: "in the use of the spirituall calling of Divines, there is danger sometimes to be feared, from want of skill, such as is reported of unskillfull Conjurers, that mistaking the rites and ceremonious points of their art, call up such spirits, as they cannot at their pleasure allay againe."⁶⁶ Hobbes may be gesturing sarcastically at the famous performance of Marlowe's *Faustus* where the appearance of an extra devil on stage sent actors and audience running in terror, a story that had become a watchword for the superstitious gullibility of theatrical audiences.

Inspiration, Pentecostal illuminations, mysterious muses who visit chosen men—in Restoration England all of this was liable to suspicion and contempt. Milton shared neither Davenant's disdain for the work of the dead nor Hobbes's disdain for individual inspiration, yet he was nevertheless skeptical of slavish adherence to convention and of claims to divine sanction based on conscience. The undefined nature of the muse in *Paradise Lost* challenges the reader to confront the questions presented by invoking classical tradition or prophetic inspiration. We, like the narrator, are faced with Hamlet's problem. We must trust that the voice who "say[s]" the story (*PL* 1.27), who whispers it in the narrator's ear at night, is not demonic, although the inspiring muse does ask the narrator to ventriloquize demons and leads him to forbidden places.

The final opening address of the narrator—and the most overtly dramatic—demonstrates the complexity of his relationship with his muse. The narrator speaks sadly as he begins book 9:

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

(*PL* 9.1–4)

The narrator and the reader will experience the fateful day that follows from the perspective of our mortal knowledge. We already expect the loss of heavenly repasts and "Venial discourse" (9.5). Yet for Adam and Eve, inside the plot, the day that unfolds in book 9 begins with what could have seemed sweet domestic comedy. A lively argument about work won by a woman who knows how to flirt and how to stage a scene, a beautiful morning and a much anticipated lunch: "talk" and "rural repast" seem the order of business to the human actors. Instead, book 9 begins in happiness and ends in disaster. In the complex and logical plot of *Paradise Lost* the couple's disobedience is the tragic peripeteia, the cause that necessitates all that follows. The narrator therefore warns at the beginning of the book,

I now must change
Those Notes to Tragic; foul distrust, and breach
Disloyal on the part of Man, revolt,
And disobedience: On the part of Heav'n
Now alienated, distance and distaste,
Anger and just rebuke, and judgment giv'n,
That brought into this World a world of woe,
Sin and her shadow Death, and Misery
Death's Harbinger.

(*PL* 9.5–13)

Yet at precisely the same time that he announces tragedy, the narrator also makes emphatically clear that he is writing epic, albeit an epic "sufficient of itself to raise / That name" (9.43–44). The narrator compiles a long list of epic arguments he deems "less . . . Heroic" (9.14) and asserts that he is attempting a version of epic that aims at a "higher Argument" (9.42) than has ever been achieved before. He attempts to reach that epic height by means of embedded elements of drama that give the poem its immediacy, its tension, and its power to engage the audience in surprising sympathies and necessary choices.

The narrator's very discussion of his epic ambitions is itself, for example, a dramatic soliloquy. The opening of book 9 is the narrator's last extended speech. It is conventionally called, like the openings of books 1, 3, and 7, an invocation, but the poet does not call upon his muse. Instead he weighs his generic choices and assesses his remaining strength and energy; he speaks to himself, but, of course, he knows he speaks to his audience as well. When he discusses his muse he refers to her only in the third person. He will write his revisionary epic:

If answerable style I can obtain
Of my Celestial Patroness, who deigns
Her nightly visitation unimplor'd,
And dictates to me slumb'ring, or inspires
Easy my unpremeditated Verse. (PL 9.20–24)

Throughout *Paradise Lost*, soliloquies are spoken by fallen characters—demonic or human.⁶⁷ While the audience should remember from the beginning that the narrator is mortal, his fallenness, his ambiguity as a character, and his danger as a guide are nowhere more evident than in the soliloquy that opens the tragedy played out in books 9 and 10. The characteristic degree of uncertainty in the narrator's speeches is particularly acute here: if he can obtain an appropriate style from this patroness who comes to him as he sleeps and dictates lines, or, instead, if she inspires him to find the words himself.⁶⁸ This speech dramatically underscores the degree of trust we must place in the narrator and his source. Like the Lady, we must say "lead on" (*A Maske*, 330) to our guide, and his, or leave the poem behind in darkness.

Perhaps the most disturbing moment in this soliloquy is the enjambed surprise "inspires / Easy" (PL 9.23–24). If we did not know before we began *Paradise Lost* (and Milton would have expected us to know), we have learned by book 9 that ease and anything called easy are suspect at best, but that they are most often satanic. Ease is the privilege of heaven and Eden alone. Even in paradise, however, it causes anxiety. It takes a good morning's work to make "ease / more easy" (4.329–30), and nevertheless Eve understands that their gardening is endless labor "if we mean to tread with ease" (4.632).

Adam is unfortunately prone to find things easy. He regales Eve with their edenic bliss, dependent simply on "This one, this easy charge, of all the Trees / In Paradise...not to taste" (4.421–23). "Then let us not think hard," he tells her, "One easy prohibition" (4.432–33). That he calls their one charge easy and does so twice is a dramatic irony, of course. Even in heaven, God's easy is not as easy as he makes it seem:

Easy it may be seen that I intend
Mercy colleague with Justice, sending thee
Man's Friend, his Mediator, his design'd
Both Ransom and Redeemer voluntary. (PL 10.58–61)

Accepting the sacrifice of Christ is one of the most difficult challenges in Milton's theology.

Among the fallen, easy is a deeply corrupting goal. The fallen angels try to glorify themselves by mocking the singing angels, "Whose easier business were to serve thir Lord / High up in Heav'n" where they "cringe, not fight" (PL 4.943–45). Characteristically, the fallen angels want to smear others with their own failings. Mammon tries to make his temporizing policy seem noble by claiming that it means "preferring / Hard liberty before the easy yoke / Of servile Pomp" (2.255–57). The narrator himself is worried enough about the power of Belial's argument that, rather than risk the reader's misapprehension, he violates his usual procedure and breaks in angrily to spell out Belial's danger: his "words cloth'd in reason's garb / Counsell'd ignoble ease, and peaceful sloth, / Not peace" (2.226–28). When the devils take comfort in their plan, "Thence more at ease thir minds"; they are, however, simply deluding themselves "By false presumptuous hope" (2.521–22). There is no ease for the fallen, and especially so since Satan needs always to seek impossible ease at their expense: "only in destroying I find ease / To my relentless thoughts" (9.129–30).

The only really easy thing in *Paradise Lost* is demonic intercourse with us. Once Satan leaves Chaos, he "now with ease / Wafts on the calmer wave by dubious light" (PL 2.1041–42). Satan, like "a prowling Wolf," "Leaps o'er the fence with ease into the Fold" (4.183, 187). The bridge from hell to earth is called easy

virtually every time it is mentioned in the poem: on it, for example, "the Spirits perverse / With easy intercourse pass to and fro" (2.1030–31). It is "a passage broad, / Smooth, easy, inoffensive down to Hell" (10.304–05), an "easy thorough-fare" (10.393). Satan sends Sin and Death "on your Road with ease" (10.394).

The first poem Milton published was his extravagant praise of Shakespeare, shaded with his envy that Shakespeare's "easy numbers flow" ("On Shakespeare," 10); John Milton's was, by implication, a "slow-endeavouring art" (9), built through the labor of learning and revision. A cutting blade is embedded in Milton's conceit for it implies that Shakespeare's "easy numbers" bereave us of our fancy and kill his readers' minds. When the narrator of *Paradise Lost* begins the story of the Fall by expecting inspiration "Easy" and "unpremeditated," readers should be uncomfortable and alert. An epic sails on its divine inspiration, its narrator a mouthpiece for nation and religion; we rely upon the singer's deep belief. But what do we do in *Paradise Lost* if the narrator is not completely reliable? And if the inspiring muse is unnerving, like the daemon/demon of *A Maske*? Confirming Plato's fearful analysis, the narrator of this dramatic epic does ventriloquize (sometimes at the remove of two) the role of each character dramatized in his story. Who is ventriloquizing him?

Paradise Lost is, undeniably, a deeply religious poem. Nevertheless, Milton's rigorous protocols demand stringent, cautious, even suspicious reading. The narrator's secret interlocutor has more than one name, her (or his) identity as elusive as the narrator's ever-receding simile for Satan:

as when a wand'ring Fire,
Compact of unctuous vapor, which the Night
Condenses, and the cold invirons round,
Kindl'd through agitation to a Flame,
Which oft, they say, some evil Spirit attends,
Hovering and blazing with delusive Light,
Misleads th' amaz'd Night-wanderer from his way.

(PL 9.634–40)

Yet much Milton criticism has assumed that Milton's muse is the Holy Spirit, in spite of the fact that the author of *De doctrina Christiana* states that no one should invoke the third person of God.⁶⁹ Perhaps this is because Christianity erects a formidable barrier against any but an orthodox understanding of Milton's muse and his notions of inspiration in general.⁷⁰ In fairness, literary, intellectual, and political history also have their versions of orthodoxy. Depending on one's perspective, therefore, the muse may be the third person of the Trinity; or a conventional and therefore necessary classical gesture; or a figure for the imagination; or a late Renaissance gesture of defiance in the face of rational modernity.

If we take the poem on its own terms, however, we cannot accept the narrator's source of inspiration without question. The chilling moment when Satan settles on his vehicle, the serpent which "Fearless unfear'd . . . slept" (PL 9:187), resonates deliberately against the inspired narrator whose visions come "In darkness, and with dangers compast round, / And solitude; yet not alone, while thou / Visit'st my slumbers Nightly" (7.27–29). Satan's possession of the sleeping beast is explicitly prophetic, albeit a fearsome demonic version of prophecy: "in at his Mouth / The Devil enter'd, and his brutal sense, / In heart or head, possessing soon inspir'd / With act intelligential" (9.187–90). That *Paradise Lost* makes so utterly clear the danger of night-visited inspiration is a warning to its readers that it would be foolish to ignore. Certainly Eve's dream is a warning to the reader as much as it is an upsetting warning to her and her perhaps overly complacent husband. Satan works to inspire her bodily spirits and thus her mind:

Assaying by his Devilish art to reach
The Organs of her Fancy, and with them forge
Illusions as he list, Phantasms and Dreams,
Or if, inspiring venom, he might taint
Th' animal spirits that from pure blood arise
Like gentle breaths from Rivers pure, thence raise
At least distemper'd, discontented thoughts,
Vain hopes, vain aims, inordinate desires
Blown up with high conceits ingend'ring pride.

(4.801–09)

Intertwined in this passage are two of the important meanings of "spirit" in *Paradise Lost*—the angels, fallen and otherwise, on the one hand, and the intertwined physical, intellectual, and emotional life of human beings, on the other. The moment itself is emblematic of the poem's procedures. We imagine this scene of the sleeping woman, the devil crouched at her ear, the splendid angels arriving to prod him into his wonted form because the narrator retells it. It is a highly dramatic moment interlaced with epic evocations. Since either Satan or the narrator's interpretation of Satan's imagination has just described Eden as "a woody Theatre" (4.141), the dramatic element is underscored. We, the audience, learn privileged information of which the main characters remain innocent. The dramatic is then carefully tempered with epic overtones; the Iago-like Satan in his theatrical disguise is revealed by two heroic military angels and a scene of epic boasting, embellished with epic similes, ensues. *Paradise Lost* has often been described as architectonic in its complex symmetries and embedded, sometimes shocking mirrorings. This exciting and disturbing scene of psychological manipulation has wider reverberations crucial to the poem and to the act of reading the poem. Here inspiration becomes "venom" and the spirit who inspires is, like Augustine's demons, an actor playing a role in the human world, an actor who means to destroy us all. A reader, given these strong parallels, would be sinfully naïve not to wonder about the narrator's inspiration and the spirit who brings it in the night.

The narrator does suggest that he believes that this "Spirit" who lives in the "upright heart and pure" (PL 1.17–18) is the third person of God, but the reader needs to distinguish between what the narrator believes and what the poem leaves open. The narrator invokes the Spirit to aid his own creativity because "Thou from the first / Wast present, and with mighty wings outspread / Dove-like satst brooding on the vast Abyss / And mad'st it pregnant" (1.19–22). Yet in a poem infused with spirits, the Holy Spirit makes remarkably few appearances. The Chariot of Paternal Deity is "Itself instinct with Spirit," a reference to Ezekiel, but one touched with the gleeful humor of the war in heaven (6.752).⁷¹ Other references to God's Spirit are remarkably ambiguous. The angelic choir

praises the "Begotten Son, Divine Similitude" as an embodiment of the father: "on thee / Impresst th' effulgence of his Glory abides, / Transfus'd on thee his ample Spirit rests" (3.384, 387–89). When the Father sends the Son to create the world, he calls him "my Word" and assures him that "My overshadowing Spirit and might with thee / I send along" (7.163, 165–66). The Spirit remains a shadowy figure, enabling the Son in his divinity.

The one moment in *Paradise Lost* when the Holy Spirit is insisted upon as a separate actor is in book 12 when Michael is trying to explain to Adam how the world would change after Christ. Yet this is precisely the moment when the poem seems to lack an animating spirit. Notoriously, book 12 does not fit well with the rest of *Paradise Lost*. Michael tries to assert truth, not show it; he runs through Judeo-Christian history bizarrely skimping on the Son's redemptive role along the way. Much of book 12 is bitter—angry at political entities, and particularly religious ones. It is also an explicit rejection of the dramatic, replacing the instructive scenes of book 11 with dry exposition. Remarkably, it is only here, at the end of the poem, where the Holy Spirit comes into sharp focus. Immediately after Christ's victory over sin and death and his return to heaven, God sends "a Comforter" to the early Christians:

The promise of the Father, who shall dwell
His Spirit within them, and the Law of Faith
Working through love, upon thir hearts shall write,
To guide them in all truth, and also arm
With spiritual Armor, able to resist
Satan's assaults.

(PL 12.486–92)

Michael's ringing assertion is, however, immediately and terribly qualified. The Spirit of God itself is dangerously appropriable by those who, in its name, "Spiritual Laws by carnal power shall force / On every conscience" (12.521–22). In the most straightforward assertion of the Holy Spirit in *Paradise Lost* the possible arrogation of this invisible power is strongly underscored. Spirit is frighteningly transformative, and the Fall itself is enabled by this slippery potency.

4. Fit Audience

An interpretive trinity constitutes *Paradise Lost*: narrator, muse, and audience. The narrator may not completely trust the audience, we may not completely trust him, and the Spirit touches both narrator and audience, although to what extent and to what ends we cannot be sure. The poem exists within this tensile relationship. Inside the poem's larger narrative, the two angelic narrators explain their interpretive relationship to Adam as accommodation. Raphael confronts the "Sad task and hard" (PL 5.564) of telling Adam the story of the war in heaven:

and what surmounts the reach
Of human sense, I shall delineate so,
By lik'ning spiritual to corporal forms,
As may express them best, though what if Earth
Be but the shadow of Heav'n, and things therein
Each to other like, more than on Earth is thought? (5.571-76)

While he holds out the tantalizing possibility that heaven may be closely shadowed by life on earth, Raphael is speaking to an unfallen man. Michael's version of accommodation is much more difficult. The Old Testament law was a divine narrative of accommodation, hinting at what was to come, "a better Cov'nant":

From shadowy Types to Truth, from Flesh to Spirit,
From imposition of strict Laws, to free
Acceptance of large Grace, from servile fear
To filial, works of Law to works of Faith. (12.302-06)

That "better Cov'nant," however, is lonely and treacherous. The Father will send a "Comforter," an indwelling "Spirit" who "upon thir hearts shall write" (12.486-89), but hypocrites will seize the interpretive work of the "Spirit," and Truth will be fractured. The interpretive work of *Paradise Lost* is therefore much more demanding than the acceptance of an accommodated truth.

Michael predicts that only a few will "in the worship persevere / Of Spirit and Truth" (12.532-33). No doubt the narrator intends his poem to find that "fit audience... though few" (7.31). Who they are and what the right reading is, however, is beyond the bounds of our

knowledge. Over and over, *Paradise Lost* teaches us how difficult it is to be a right-judging audience. Adam, who gets the guidance of angels, repeatedly overreaches or interprets incorrectly. Even the archangel Uriel can be fooled by a brilliant performance. Crucially, though—for good and for ill, within *Paradise Lost* and beyond—the audience's participation and critical judgments determine the plot.

The triumvirate of audience, muse, and narrator echoes back through *Paradise Lost* to Shakespeare, who haunts Milton's ambitions. Milton closes "On Shakespeare" with morbid praise:

Then thou our fancy of itself bereaving,
Dost make us Marble with too much conceiving;
And so Sepulcher'd in such pomp dost lie,
That Kings for such a Tomb would wish to die. (13-16)

Here Milton echoes the opening Chorus of *Henry V*, a role Milton frequently remembers in allusions and pointed reworkings.⁷² The Chorus urges that because it is impossible for Shakespeare and his actors to have "A kingdom for a stage, princes to act, / And monarchs to behold the swelling scene" (Prologue, 1.3-4), the audience must summon its "imaginary forces" and "suppose," "piec[e] out" the actors' "imperfections with your thoughts" (Prologue, 1.18, 19, 23). The very movement of Shakespeare's play through time and space is an act of thought: "Thus with imagin'd wing our swift scene flies / In motion of no less celerity / Than that of thought" (Prologue, 3.1-3). The Chorus is a partner, but the audience of *Henry V* is the necessary creative force:

For 'tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings,
Carry then here and there, jumping o'er times,
Turning th' accomplishment of many years
Into an hour-glass: for the which supply,
Admit me Chorus to this history. (Prologue, 1.28-32)

Shakespeare's Chorus is at once the most theatrical of characters and the most private and intimate, and it asks the audience to recognize its own similarly doubled role since the audience itself must meld together physical spectator and interior reader.

The Chorus's intimate relationship with the audience and its emphasis on imagination as a means of narrative accommodation are particularly pertinent to the relationship among *Paradise Lost's* narrator, muse, and audience.⁷³ In *Henry V* the narrator's demand for audience participation is direct to the point of aggression, appealing to the theater audience's nationalism and their susceptibility to epic heroism. The Chorus actively commandeers the audience, repeatedly stressing the inadequacies of stage representation for a story of epic scope. The audience must do the work of inspiration and invention. "O do but think," the Chorus urges, "Follow, Follow / Grapple your minds," "Work, Work your thoughts / And eke out our performance with your mind" (Prologue, 3.17–18, 25–27). The kind of dominance over imagination that Shakespeare's epic Chorus seeks, Milton finds deeply suspicious. It is not imagination itself that Milton fears, however, as John Guillory claims. The continuous interchange of human mind and body, crucial to Milton's conception of the human condition, is enabled by the spirit of imagination. Rather, wary of demagoguery in support of monarchical power, Milton fears the ceding of imagination to a charismatic personality. *Henry V* has been called epic drama not only because of the theatrically difficult task of staging one of England's proudest victories, but also because of Henry's heroic but disturbingly callous ambition.⁷⁴ Shakespeare's Chorus resonates through *Paradise Lost* as a warning about demonic power, tyranny, the spilling of blood for the sake of a monarch's pride—and also a warning about the spellbinding power of a storyteller. To tell its sweeping story, Shakespeare's epic Chorus would like the aid of "a Muse of fire, that would ascend / The brightest heaven of invention" (Prologue, 1–2). Fire is a Promethean gift stolen from the gods, often a figure for inspiration and human creativity. But the Chorus's wish for a fire leaping into the heavens of invention is also clearly threatening: bold in its divine aspirations, appropriately violent for a story of war, and almost apocalyptic in its destructive energy. In *Paradise Lost* fire is demonic, the agent of warfare and artistry in hell; the muse the narrator invokes is not fire, but a "sovran vital Lamp," a "Celestial Light" (*PL* 3.22, 51). The narrator apparently elevates

and theologizes Shakespeare's epic ambition, and the muse he invokes is a willing gift of heaven. Yet in books 1 and 2 the narrator has just asked his reading audience to play, with him, the role of the devil himself. To read *Paradise Lost* right, the audience can no more accede full power over its imagination to the narrator than it should to the Chorus of *Henry V*; the reader must always parse skepticism and passion, reason and imagination.

The roles of narrator and muse are doubled many times over within the plot of *Paradise Lost*. Raphael and Michael are, for example, angelic versions of the narrator; dreams and internal voices, both divine and demonic, are figures of the muse. The audience is also represented internally on a number of levels. On a macro scale, critics have seen God as an audience for a play of his own devising; at the level of epic simile, the "belated peasant" who "sees, / Or dreams he sees" "Faery Elves" (*PL* 1.783–84, 781) has been understood as Milton's rejection of Shakespearean fancy and its audience. But the primary importance of audience goes beyond individual instances and pervades *Paradise Lost*. A few examples among many: the fallen angels debating each other in Pandaemonium; Satan lurking and spying in paradise; the army of rebel angels who mock Abdiel's arguments against treason; Adam and Raphael listening to each other's stories; the wall of angels watching Adam and Eve depart, and Adam and Eve, in turn, looking back on these "dreadful Faces" (12.644). *Paradise Lost's* use of multiple audiences is perhaps its most effective dramatic technique, constitutive of its echoing, layered structure.

But the most consequential audience in *Paradise Lost* is Eve. A long stretch in the middle of the poem where Eve is on the side, watching and listening, stands as a metatheatrical enactment of our own role as audience. From the time Raphael arrives in paradise to share lunch (book 5) until mid to late afternoon when Adam asks Raphael a reformulated version of Eve's question about the utility of the stars, and Eve leaves (book 8), she hears everything Raphael and Adam discuss. As much as her disturbing dream or the snake's seductive rhetoric, the conversation she is witness to informs her decision to eat the forbidden fruit.

Although she is not there for the most directly misogynistic moment in Raphael's lesson, the tense disagreement between her husband and the archangel about Adam's marital relationship, Eve does learn about the hierarchy of creation. She therefore knows that spirit and body exist on a continuum, she gathers that she is lower on this continuum since her mind is associated with Fancy, her husband's with Reason, and she learns the sequence of aspiration:

So from the root
Spirings lighter the green stalk, from thence the leaves
More aery, last the bright consummate flow'r
Spirits odorous breathes: flow'rs and thir fruit
Man's nourishment, by gradual scale sublim'd
To vital spirits aspire, to animal,
To intellectual, give both life and sense,
Fancy and understanding, whence the Soul
Reason receives, and reason is her being,
Discursive, or Intuitive; discourse
Is ofttest yours, the latter most is ours. (PL 5.479-89)

Because she has grasped the concept of a sliding scale of spiritual being, Eve recognizes the implications of a speaking serpent. And she eats the fruit expecting that to do so will move her closer to spirit. The fruit, she tells Adam, is "opener mine Eyes, / Dim erst." It causes "dilated Spirits, ampler Heart, / And growing up to God-head" (9.875-78). Eve is open to the insinuations of "the Spirit malign" (3.553) because Satan had assayed "his Devilish art" and with "inspiring venom" caused her to dream (4.801, 804), but she is also vulnerable because she has been an audience rather than a participant in her husband's education. She draws her own conclusion from what she observes, and then she acts upon it, trying to adapt the exchange as a model for her own life. The final result is full of redoubling tragic irony:

Soon as the force of that fallacious Fruit,
That with exhilarating vapor bland
About thir spirits had play'd, and inmost powers
Made err, was now exhal'd, and grosser sleep
Bred of unkindly fumes, with conscious dreams

Encumber'd, now had left them, up they rose
As from unrest, and each the other viewing,
Soon found thir Eyes how op'n'd, and thir minds
How dark'n'd. (9.1046-54)

Marbled through *Paradise Lost's* "Tragic" song is the recurring lesson that mediated experience is interpretable and always carries the possibility of danger. That is as true of *Paradise Lost* itself as it is of any of the poem's interpolated stories or dramatic scenes. In 1659's *A Treatise of Civil Power* Milton argued that no ruling power should force belief. The freedom to read and interpret Holy Scripture is an individual act made possible only by "the illumination of the Holy Spirit." Nevertheless, a true reading of the Scriptures is a lonely task with no assured success: "These being not possible to be understood without this divine illumination, which no man can know at all times to be in himself, much less to be at any time for certain in any other, it follows cleerly, that no man or body of men in these times can be the infallible judges or determiners in matters of religion to any other mens consciences but thir own" (YP 7:242-43). Not only must we not accede to the reading of others, neither can we sustain an absolute belief that our own readings are informed by the Holy Spirit. Reading is a drama in which the audience must judge minute by minute whether to trust the understanding we construct. Because Eve attempts to be closer to spirit, Adam and Eve are now cursed with "conscious dreams." We ourselves cannot be sure that the narrator's visitations "In darkness, and with dangers compast round, / And solitude" (7.27-28) are not "conscious dreams" stirred by treacherous spirits.

Eve is a troubling figure. For thousands of years before *Paradise Lost* she bore the blame for the Fall. *Paradise Lost* dramatizes Eve as a psychologically complex woman who strives for agency and experience; nevertheless, the narrator watches Eve warily, and there are many voices raised to diminish or blame her. As a figure of the reading audience, is she therefore an instance of Milton's notorious mistrust of the common herd? Eve's actions trigger the fall of humankind. On the other hand, her remorse saves Adam from satanic despair, and her archetype will give birth to the Son. No one involved with the poem trusts her: not her husband, her divine

creator, the narrator of the poem in which she lives, not Milton himself. But she is, like the reader, essential. Milton probably did not trust his readers either, but he needed us. Sharon Achinstein has proposed that Milton's prose teaches a "revolutionary reader" how to analyze, recognize irony, and see through deceptive rhetoric in order to participate in a new public sphere.⁷⁵ But while Milton's procedures in the polemical prose can inform our reading, they cannot be a template for understanding his Restoration poetry. In writing an epic poem for an audience reading in the imaginable and unimaginable future, Milton explicitly dramatizes how even the best of teachers can only partly succeed. In *Paradise Lost*, therefore, Milton does not try to stage manage his readers, or write a secret script just for the few. *Paradise Lost* is wide open to interpretation. Like Eve, readers have agency and become actors, authors to ourselves. Classic epic poems were sung by bards; the genre was profoundly performative. In writing a modern epic poem for print culture Milton gave the performance of the poem to his readers. Therein lies its greatness.

The poem's indeterminacy and our resulting anxiety honors the mysteries it evokes. It is significant that *Paradise Lost* is drained of theatricality at precisely that point where Michael dictates understanding to Adam. Perhaps this lack of dramatic vitality is itself a dramatic representation of what "the sacred mysteries of Heav'n" would seem to us without the complex seeking, erring, and role-playing that dramatic reading allows (12.509). It is significant, too, that when Michael releases Adam from his tutelage immediately after this last lesson, the poem rises again to breathtaking beauty. Eve and the narrator have the last words. The sense of hope and fear, of comfort and unease that suffuses the last lines is assured by Eve's belief that her final dream has "some great good / Presaging" (12.612–13). The narrator's last speech, freed from the constraint of the archangel's surety, is *Paradise Lost's* epilogue. As Adam and Eve walk out into our world, the narrator—lonely, blind, yearning for light—turns the poem over to us.

"Immota Triumphans": *Paradise Lost* and Caroline Corruptions of the Roman Triumph

Rob Browning

Paradise Lost is a poem alive with movement: the rebel angels fall precipitously from heaven to hell; Satan traverses the vast expanses of Chaos to reach earth; Adam and Eve labor actively in the garden of Eden, experiencing dynamic progressions and regressions both educationally and spiritually; the Son descends to the fallen garden and later reascends to heaven triumphant; and, near the end of the poem, Michael shows Adam the future, predominantly tragic, movements of human history. Considering this rich context of perpetual motion, we should not be surprised to find in *Paradise Lost* numerous ceremonial processions—triumphs, entry pageants, exit parades—no fewer than a dozen occasions when a multitude of participants move together in celebratory, ritualistic fashion. These forms lend themselves well to Milton's kinetic imagination because they each involve, quite literally, a progression from one place to another, conspicuously marking moments of transition in the poem's plot. More significantly, the parades serve as metaphors for the political actions of the participants.

general studies, see Desiree Hellegers, *Handmaid to Divinity: Natural Philosophy, Poetry, and Gender in Seventeenth-Century England* (Norman, Okla., 2000), 103–40; and Karen L. Edwards, *Milton and the Natural World: Science and Poetry in "Paradise Lost"* (Cambridge, 1999).

27. Rajan, unpublished essay (1985). See also Falconer, *Orpheus*, 172; and Kinney, *Narrative*, 162.

28. See Hughes, *Complete Poems*, 410n; and *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 7th ed., ed. M. H. Abrams and Stephen Greenblatt (New York, 2000), 2043n.

29. See Diane McColley, "Eve and the Arts of Eden," in *Milton and the Idea of Woman*, ed. Julia M. Walker (Urbana, 1988), 100–19. On Milton's strong identification of Eve's creativity with vitalist concepts of female-centered generation, see also John Rogers, *The Matter of Revolution: Science, Poetry, and Politics in the Age of Milton* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1996), 119–22. Of course, the central image of the male poet as mother was a commonplace of the period. See Katharine Eisaman Maus, "A Womb of His Own: Male Renaissance Poets in the Female Body," in *Parenting and Printing in Early Modern England*, ed. Douglas A. Brooks (Aldershot, 2003), 89–108.

30. See William Kerrigan, *The Prophetic Milton* (Charlottesville, Va., 1974), 143–44.

31. Cited from *The Early Lives of Milton*, ed. Helen Darbishire (London, 1932), 33; emphasis in the original.

32. See, in particular, Kerrigan, *The Sacred Complex: On the Psychogenesis of "Paradise Lost"* (Cambridge, Mass., 1983). Older biographers attributed the timing of Milton's trip to an inheritance they speculate he may have received upon his mother's death. See the discussion of earlier views in Peter Levi, *Eden Renewed: The Public and Private Life of John Milton* (London, 1996), 95–96. But there is no evidence to support this theory; it seems to me equally likely that the impetus to travel then rather than earlier sprang from motivations that were other than financial.

33. Cited from Lynn E. Enterline, "'Myself / Before Me': Gender and Prohibition in Milton's Italian Sonnets," in Walker, *Milton and the Idea of Woman*, 32–51; see also the discussions in Janet E. Halley, "Female Autonomy in Milton's Sexual Poetics," in Walker, *Milton and the Idea of Woman*, 230–53; and Christine Froula, "When Eve Reads Milton: Undoing the Canonical Economy," *Critical Inquiry* 10 (1983): 321–47.

34. Halley, "Female Autonomy," 239.

35. See Martin, *Milton and Gender*, 1.

36. Katherine Eggert, *Showing Like a Queen: Female Authority and Literary Experiment in Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton* (Philadelphia, 2000), 180–81.

37. Eggert, *Showing Like a Queen*, 21. See also Shannon Miller, *Engendering the Fall*, which demonstrates Milton's many links with women mystics and prophets who, as Eve and Milton's narrator are portrayed in *Paradise Lost*, describe themselves as passive recipients of divine truth.

Notes to Coiro, "Drama in the Epic Style"

1. The subtitle of *Samson Agonistes*. All references to Milton's poetry will be to *Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (New York, 1957).

2. Milton began four outlined versions of a play about Adam and Eve in the Trinity manuscript. Satan's soliloquy to the sun was originally the opening scene of a fully written tragedy, according to Edward Phillips. It is possible that other of the long dramatic speeches in *Paradise Lost* were originally written for a tragedy. The opening sentence of Merritt Hughes's introduction to *Paradise Lost* in his venerable 1957 edition states as a simple truth, "A reader coming to *Paradise Lost* for the first time, and going rapidly through it to the end of Book X, is likely to get the impression that he is reading drama" (173).

3. Barbara Lewalski, "*Paradise Lost*" and the Rhetoric of Literary Forms (Princeton, N.J., 1985), masterfully unthreads the many generic strands that make up *Paradise Lost*. She calls the epic poem an "encyclopedia" of forms and argues that Milton runs through the changes of every classical genre, including pastoral and comedy in Eden, and tragedy in books 9 and 10. In the interest of comprehensive inventory, Lewalski can at times level the generic landscape in ways that distort the poem, however. Joan Malory Webber, *Milton and His Epic Tradition* (Seattle, 1979), 4–5, argues instead that because epic is such a capacious and flexible genre it can allow another dominant genre to shade into itself. Webber offers *The Faerie Queene* as an example of a romance epic. See also Roger B. Rollin, "Paradise Lost: 'Tragical—Comical—Historical—Pastoral,'" in *Milton Studies*, vol. 5, ed. James D. Simmonds, 3–37 (Pittsburgh, 1973).

4. "Milton," in *Lives of the English Poets*, ed. George Birkbeck Hill (Oxford, 1905), 1:169, 190.

5. Among the many early- and mid-twentieth-century scholars who have written on Milton and drama notable are: James Holly Hanford, John Steadman, William Riley Parker, John Demaray, Merritt Y.

Hughes, Helen Gardner, and Frank Kermode. Timothy Burbery, *Milton the Dramatist* (Pittsburgh, 2007), speculates about plays Milton might have seen in the commercial theater in his youth and how they may have influenced his work.

6. Anne Ferry, *Milton's Epic Voice: The Narrator in "Paradise Lost"* (1963; repr., Chicago, 1983).

7. Stanley Fish, *Surprised by Sin* (1967; repr., Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1971).

8. On Ferry and Fish, see also Paul Stevens, *Imagination and the Presence of Shakespeare in "Paradise Lost"* (Madison, 1985), 94–95.

9. The critical choice of "blind bard" as a substitute term for the narrator reveals a tenderness and a bias. It is a protective redeployment since the first use (by Richard Leigh in *The Transproser Rehearsed*, 1673) was contemporary and mean-spirited, referring to the blind poet himself. But mantling Milton with Homer's traditional epithet strongly emphasizes the epic genre.

10. William Davenant, "The Author's Preface," in *Gondibert*, ed. David F. Gladish (Oxford, 1971), 15. Hobbes is less willing to overthrow the past, but he strongly approves of Davenant's dramatic epic innovation.

11. *Ibid.*, 6, 7.

12. Davenant argues, "by that regular species (though narratively and not in Dialogue) I have drawn the body of an Heroick Poem: In which I did not only observe the Symmetry (proportioning five bookes to five Acts, and *Canto's* to *Scenes*... but all the *shadowings*, *happy strokes*, *secret graces*, and even the *drapery* (which together make the second beauty) I have [I hope] exactly follow'd: and those compositions of second beauty, I observe in the *Drama* to be the underwalks, interweaving, or correspondence of lesser designe in *Scenes*, not the great motion of the maine plot, and coherence of the *Acts*" (16).

13. Literary theory did not directly address the act of reading drama until Addison's *Spectator* pieces on Milton and Shakespeare.

14. During the civil wars and Interregnum, prose polemics were also written in dramatic forms. See Lois Potter, *Secret Rites and Secret Writing: Royalist Literature, 1641–1660* (Cambridge, 1989), 90–93, and Nigel Smith, *Literature and Revolution in England, 1640–1660* (New Haven, 1994), 70–92.

15. Thomas Bodley, cited by Heidi Brayman Hackel, "'Rowme' of Its Own: Printed Drama in Early Libraries," in *A New History of English Drama*, ed. John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan (New York, 1997), 113.

16. Hackel, "'Rowme' of Its Own," 119–22.

17. When the poem Milton called "On Shakespeare" in 1645 was first published in the 1632 Second Folio, its title was "An Epitaph on the Admirable Dramatick Poet W. Shakespear."

18. The poem was printed with the undated quarto edition of Fletcher's play. I am citing William B. Hunter Jr.'s edition of Ben Jonson's *Complete Poetry* (New York, 1968), 347, ll. 1–2; line numbers hereafter cited in the text.

19. "Ode to Himselſe," in Hunter, *Complete Poetry*, 386, l. 1.

20. See Benedict Scott Robinson, "Thomas Heywood and the Cultural Politics of Play Collections," *SEL* 42, no. 2 (2002): 361–80.

21. "Textual Notes" to *Troilus and Cressida*, in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 2nd ed., ed. Anne Barton, gen. ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston, 1997), 526. All further references to Shakespeare's work will be to this edition.

22. For a discussion not only of the importance of Terence and Plautus in humanist education, but also of the effect the newly rediscovered Plautus had on genre theory, see Richard F. Hardin, "Encountering Plautus in the Renaissance: A Humanist Debate on Comedy," *Renaissance Quarterly* 60 (2007): 789–818.

23. Thomas Hobbes, "Of the Liberty of Subjects," *Leviathan*, ed. C. B. MacPherson (1968; repr., New York, 1985), 268.

24. On Wase, see Potter, *Secret Rites and Secret Writing*, 53–54; and Christopher Orchard, "'In time of Warre... our Language is all corrupt with military Tearms': The Politics of Martial Metaphors in Post-Regicide England," in *Milton and the Terms of Liberty*, ed. Graham Parry and Joad Raymond (Woodbridge, U.K., 2002), 95–96, 102–06.

25. Christopher Wase, "The Return," in *Electra of Sophocles presented to Her Highnesse the Lady Elizabeth; with an epilogue, shewing the Parallell in two poems, the return, and the restauration* (The Hague, 1649), 3.

26. Nicholas McDowell, *Poetry and Allegiance in the English Civil Wars: Marvell and the Cause of Wit* (Oxford, 2008).

27. Milton cites Pareus's authority in *Reason of Church-Government* (Hughes, *Complete Poems*, 669).

28. David Pareus, *A Commentary upon the Divine Revelation of the Apostle and Evangelist John*, trans. Elias Arnold (Amsterdam, 1644), 20. Milton also refers to Pareus's understanding of Revelation as a tragedy in the headnote to *Samson Agonistes*. Similarly, Joseph Mede, highly regarded tutor at Christ's College, Cambridge, while Milton was a student there, called Revelation the "Apocalyptique Theatre." He imagines that John and "other beholders" watch a "rehersall" of the Apocalypse "not much unlike to our Academical interludes,

where the prompters stand neere the Actors, with their books in their hands"; cited from the 1643 translation of Mede's *Clavis Apocalyptica* (1627) by William Kerrigan, *The Prophetic Milton* (Charlottesville, Va., 1974), 115.

29. The standard work on antitheatricity remains Jonas Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1981). But see also Martin Puchner, *Stage-Fright: Modernism, Anti-Theatricality, and Drama* (Baltimore, 2002). Plato divides poetry into three modes of narrative: the narrative mode spoken by the poet, the dramatic mode, spoken by characters alone, and a mixed mode, where the narrator speaks sometimes and sometimes yields to the characters. Medieval commentators often used this tripartite division. See Lawrence M. Clopper, *Drama, Play, and Game: English Festive Culture in the Medieval and Early Modern Period* (Chicago, 2001), 6.

30. Aristotle, *The Basic Works*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York, 1941), 26.1462b, 5.1449b.

31. John Milton, "Of That Sort of Dramatic Poem which is Call'd Tragedy," in Hughes, *Complete Poems*, 549.

32. *The Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, 8 vols., ed. Don M. Wolfe et al. (New Haven, 1953–82), 8:554; hereafter cited in the text as YP. All references to Milton's dramatic sketches in the Trinity MS will be to this transcription.

33. See Jane Melbourne, "The Narrator as Chorus in *Paradise Lost*," *SEL* 33 (1993): 149–65.

34. Hughes, *Complete Poems*, 669.

35. Pareus, *Commentary upon the Divine Revelation*, 20.

36. *Ibid.*, 20.

37. See, for example, the hymn to the Son, which the narrator introduces: "No voice exempt, no voice but well could join / Melodious part, such concord is in Heav'n" (*PL* 3.370–71) and that ends, curiously, in the first person: "thy Name / Shall be the copious matter of my Song / Henceforth" (3.412–14).

38. "At a Solemn Music," 6, in Hughes, *Complete Poems*.

39. Robert Weimann, *Author's Pen and Actor's Voice: Playing and Writing in Shakespeare's Theatre*, ed. Helen Higbee and William West (Cambridge, 2000), 137–38, stresses the element of crowd control rather than collaboration.

40. See K. Janet Ritch, "The Role of the Presenter in Medieval Drama," in *"Bring forth the pageants": Essays in Early English Drama Presented to Alexandra F. Johnston* (Toronto, 2007), 230–68, for an overview. I am indebted throughout this discussion to Christine Chism for her knowledgeable advice on medieval drama.

41. On doubling, see David M. Bevington, *From "Mankind" to Marlowe* (Cambridge, Mass., 1962).

42. It is rare to have a character whose only function is to introduce, with the notable exception of the N-Town sequence—a Corpus Christi cycle that may have been professionalized and brought from town to town by traveling players, where a special character called the Vexillator does the introducing.

43. See Bernard Spivak, *Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil* (New York, 1958); Bevington, *From "Mankind" to Marlowe*; Robert Weimann, *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theater: Studies in the Social Dimension of Dramatic Form and Function*, ed. Robert Schwartz (Baltimore, 1978); John D. Cox, *The Devil and the Sacred in English Drama, 1350–1642* (Cambridge, 2000); and Clopper, *Drama, Play, and Game*.

44. Terence, for example, who was much imitated in late medieval and humanist schoolrooms, begins each of his plays with a disarming prologue admitting and defending his own imitation of the Greeks. See Michelle M. Butler, "Baleus Prolocutor and the Establishment of the Prologue in Sixteenth-Century Drama," in *Tudor Drama before Shakespeare, 1485–1590: New Directions for Research, Criticism, and Pedagogy*, ed. Lloyd Edward Kermode, Jason Scott-Warren, and Martine van Elk (New York, 2004), 93–100.

45. John Bale, *The Complete Plays*, 2 vols., ed. Peter Happe (Cambridge, 1986), 2:53.

46. I do not mean to downplay the importance of Bale's dramatic experiments for early Tudor drama. See Ritchie D. Kendall, *The Drama of Dissent: The Radical Poetics of Nonconformity, 1380–1590* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1986); and Paul Whitfield White, *Theatre and Reformation: Protestantism, Patronage, and Playing in Tudor England* (Cambridge, 1993); and more generally Houston Diehl, *Staging Reform, Reforming the Stage: Protestantism and Popular Theater in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1997).

47. Autrey Nell Wiley, "The English Vogue of Prologues and Epilogues," *Modern Language Notes* 47 (1932): 255–57. See also the list of characters called Prologues in Thomas L. Berger, William C. Bradford, and Sidney L. Sondergard, *An Index of Characters in Early Modern Drama Printed Plays, 1500–1660*, rev. ed. (Cambridge, 1998), 81–82.

48. John Dryden, *Rival Ladies*, in *Works*, 20 vols. (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1956–96), 8:103, ll. 5–8.

49. John Dryden and William Davenant, *The Tempest*, in *ibid.*, 10:103, l. 2.

50. See Laura Lunger Knoppers, *Historicizing Milton: Spectacle, Power, and Poetry in Restoration England* (Athens, Ga., 1994), 87–91; and Nicholas Jose, *Ideas of the Restoration in English Literature, 1660–71* (Cambridge, Mass., 1984).

51. Prologue to *The Assigment* (1673), in Dryden, *Works*, 11:324, l. 1, and "Epilogue to *S^r Martin Mar-all* (1667), in Dryden, *Works*, 9:209, l. 1

52. "Second Prologue" to *Secret-Love* (1667), in Dryden, *Works*, 9:120, ll. 35–42.

53. Scholars are not certain whether Peele's *David and Faire Bethsabe* was ever performed.

54. George Peele, *The Love of David and Faire Bethsabe*, 1–6, in *The Dramatic Works*, ed. Elmer Blistein (New Haven, 1970); line numbers cited hereafter in the text.

55. Peele's effort at moral control extends to the play's two extant choruses who break into the action to express disapproval and warning. The surviving text appears to be only part of Peele's play. See Blistein's introduction to *The Dramatic Works*, 181–82.

56. See Sue Starke, "'The Eternal Now': Virgilian Echoes and Miltonic Premonitions in Cowley's *Dauids*," *Christianity and Literature* 55 (2006): 195–219.

57. The Chorus itself thinks *The Tragedie of Mariam* is pedagogical. Theirs is the final couplet of the play: "This day alone, our sages Hebrews shall / In after times the school of wisdom call" (5.Chorus.31–36). Elizabeth Cary, *The Tragedie of Mariam*, ed. Stephanie J. Wright (Staffordshire, 1996).

58. See Cox, *The Devil and the Sacred*, 107–49.

59. Christopher Marlowe, *Dr Faustus A-Text*, ed. David Bevington and Eric Rasmussen (Oxford, 1995), 1.3.77–81.

60. Robert Ornstein, "Marlowe and God: The Tragic Theology of *Doctor Faustus*," *PMLA* 83 (1968): 1378, dismisses "the choric homiletic pieties."

61. Joseph Westlund, "The Orthodox Christian Framework of Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*," *SEL* 3 (1963): 205, calls attention to and then tries to deny this problem.

62. Ornstein, "Marlowe and God," 1382, makes this point about Marlowe, although in the process he uses Milton as a straw man to represent orthodoxy. Among Miltonists, the debate about the degree to which Milton espouses the worldview of Greek tragedy is old, honorable, and unresolved.

63. Hill, *Lives of the English Poets*, 1:167, 169.

64. Gordon Campbell and Thomas N. Corns, *John Milton: Life, Work, and Thought* (Oxford, 2008), 126.

65. Davenant, *Gondibert*, 3.

66. Thomas Hobbes, "Answer to Davenant," in *ibid.*, 48.

67. But see David Robertson, "Soliloquy and Self in Milton's Major Poems," in *Of Poetry and Politics: New Essays on Milton and His World*, ed. P. G. Stanwood (Binghamton, N.Y., 1995), 59–78, for a careful qualification of this point.

68. For a sustained reflection on moments of linguistic uncertainty in Milton's work, see Peter C. Herman, *Destabilizing Milton: "Paradise Lost" and the Poetics of Incertitude* (Hampshire, 2005).

69. See Maurice Kelley, *This Great Argument: A Study of Milton's "De doctrina christiana" as a Gloss upon "Paradise Lost"* (Princeton, N.J., 1941), 106–18.

70. William Kerrigan frames the problem honestly in the introduction to *The Prophetic Milton* (Charlottesville, Va., 1977), 15. He admits he does not share Milton's beliefs, but he operates in his analysis of Milton's work as if he does: "I assume throughout this study that I do in fact believe in prophetic inspiration" (15). This willingness to pretend in order to read the poem is a good example of the kinds of dramatic choices readers make.

71. See also *PL* 6.848 and 7.204. For the war in heaven as parodic, see Arnold Stein, "The War in Heaven," in *Answerable Style: Essays on "Paradise Lost"* (Minneapolis, 1953), 17–37.

72. Stevens, *Imagination and Presence*, 6–7, 145–46, brilliantly explicates some of Milton's allusions to Henry V in *Paradise Lost*.

73. John Guillory, *Poetic Authority* (New York, 1983), argues that Milton rejects Shakespeare in the process of rejecting vitality, fancy, and imagination. Stevens, *Imagination and Presence*, on the other hand, takes issue with the absoluteness of such claims and argues instead that Milton finds a shadowy type of divine inspiration in Shakespeare's power.

74. See Gary Taylor's introduction to *Henry V* (Oxford, 1982), 1–74.

75. Sharon Achinstein, *Milton and the Revolutionary Reader* (Princeton, N.J., 1994). Building on Achinstein's hypothesis, Daniel Shore, "'Fit though few': *Eikonoklastes* and the Rhetoric of Audience," in *Milton Studies*, vol. 45, ed. Albert C. Labriola (Pittsburgh, 2006), 131, argues that Milton's insistence that he is only talking to a special few is a rhetorical game to enlist "critical readers" for a "genuine public sphere."