

“SUFFICIENT TO HAVE STOOD, THOUGH FREE TO FALL”:
THE PARABOLIC NARRATIVE OF FREE WILL IN *PARADISE LOST*

by

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ABSTRACT

“‘Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall’: The Parabolic Narrative of Free Will in *Paradise Lost*” demonstrates how reading Milton’s *Paradise Lost* as a parable offers new insight into the lessons of the poem. A parable is a narrative with a moral lesson; it teaches its lesson by using familiar topics in unexpected comparisons that draw readers into the text. Reading Milton’s poem in light of this definition offers new ways to discern the themes and figurative language in Milton’s poem. Specifically, seeing Milton’s poem through the lens of the parable of the Prodigal Son helps readers to better understand the tensions and relationships between the characters and God. This dissertation reveals how looking at Milton’s characters and their roles in a new way—as complementary parts of a parabolic narrative—enables us to better understand how the characters function in *Paradise Lost*. By examining the characters as parabolic figures, we see how they help readers perceive themselves in relation to a broader, universal experience as humans and how they teach readers the logic of free will. Seeing God’s actions from the divergent experiences and perspectives of the main characters brings new understanding of Milton’s message of the nature of God’s grace and free will. When read as a parable, the poem transforms readers’ knowledge of free will from an abstract theological conception to an experience of personal grace. My dissertation explores how *Paradise Lost* is a parabolic poem that depicts divine and human relationships in order to demonstrate to readers the logic in the radical idea that doing God’s will enables freedom. It demonstrates how considering *Paradise Lost* as a parable helps readers to

recognize their position in the world, to experience the depths of Christianity, and to gain knowledge of themselves and their relationships with God.

CHAPTER ONE: Parables, Milton, and *Paradise Lost*

James Sims alludes to a Biblical parable to suggest how readers of Milton can more fully understand Milton's texts. He asserts, "the deepening and broadening of the meaning of Milton's poems require a better than casual knowledge of the Bible. If the seed of suggestion [that] Milton sows falls upon good ground, it will bring forth a hundredfold. But even if the seed falls by the wayside and never takes root, there is enough material in the poems to carry the reader along with Milton's meaning" (Sims, *Bible* 250-251). I agree that we can consider how Milton's *Paradise Lost* works through this parabolic analogy, but I also want to suggest that we can better appreciate Milton's poem by considering it to be a parable. As a parable, *Paradise Lost* teaches readers about free will and prompts self-knowledge. Considering *Paradise Lost* as a parable brings new insight to the familiar themes and images of the poem. In this dissertation, I will explore the important relationship between the garden and the characters as I discuss how these familiar topics reflect Milton's idea of free will as he expresses it through the parable of *Paradise Lost*. The garden, Satan, Adam, and Eve characterize Milton's poem as a parable because they all illustrate the logic of free will. This dissertation demonstrates how Milton makes the lesson of free will in *Paradise Lost* applicable for readers by making the poem a parable.

Part One: Definition of Parable

In order to read *Paradise Lost* as a parable, we first must understand the genre of parables. The *Oxford English Dictionary* offers a very basic definition of a parable as "A (usually realistic) story or narrative told to convey a moral or spiritual lesson or insight;

esp. one told by Jesus in the Gospels.” Robert H. Stein builds on this simple definition of a parable by considering the Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic roots of the term. Stein compares the Greek word *parabolē*, which he defines as “an illustration, a comparison, or an analogy, usually in story form, using common events of everyday life to reveal a moral or a spiritual truth,” with the Hebrew/Aramaic term *mashal*, which he explains could be interpreted as “proverb,” “byword,” “satire,” “taunt,” “word of derision,” “riddle,” “story,” or “allegory” (Stein 16-18). These definitions provide general characterizations of parables; however, to fully understand the implication of this genre, we need to understand *how* this kind of narrative works to convey a moral or spiritual lesson. This kind of scholarship, which examines parables as narrative texts that inspire spiritual insight, has been conducted primarily by Biblical scholars. New Testament scholars, in particular, are interested in reading these Biblical narratives as parables; however, the research these scholars have done is also applicable for considering a literary parable like *Paradise Lost*.

Biblical scholars understand parables in two primary ways.¹ The first approach, based on the early work of Adolf Julicher, C. H. Dodd, and Joachim Jeremias, argues that parables are historical artifacts that must be understood in light of their historical context; the second approach, developed by Ernst Fuchs, Amos Wilder, Robert Funk, Dan Otto Via, Jr., John Dominic Crossan, and Madeleine Boucher, contends that parables are metaphorical, rhetorical, aesthetic, and/or hermeneutical texts that must be interpreted according to their language, which renders parables as applicable now as they were when

¹ For a detailed review of parable scholarship, see Craig Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990).

they were written. Since I am not analyzing Biblical parables, the historical context approach is important for my discussion of parables only as it offers definitions of how parables—as a genre—have been understood historically.² The formal, structural approach is more directly useful for this dissertation as it offers ways of understanding how language works in parables. For this reason, my dissertation relies on the work of American parable scholarship, including the research conducted by Wilder, Funk, Via, and Crossan, which approaches Biblical narratives like literary texts and analyzes their form as well as their content. This American approach discusses the metaphoric aspects of parables and explains how parables reveal knowledge and engage readers.

Since the end of the nineteenth century, parable scholars have distinguished between parables and allegories. Julicher was the first scholar to differentiate between the two kinds of figurative language and to challenge earlier Patristic, medieval, and early modern interpretations that allowed for a multiplicity of allegoric readings. Julicher's research influenced the work of Dodd and Jeremias, who similarly argue that parables are not allegories. Julicher, Dodd, and Jeremias considered allegories and parables to have different purposes and methodologies of relaying messages: allegories compare ideas,

² Joachim Jeremias discusses the parables as stories set within a specific historical situation and told for a specific purpose. His analysis is an attempt to understand and “recover the original meaning of the parables of Jesus” (Jeremias 19). Jeremias' analysis is important for this dissertation because he reminds us of the way parables function. He notes that “the parables of Jesus are not—at any rate primarily—literary productions, nor is it their object to lay down general maxims (‘no one would crucify a teacher who told pleasant stories to enforce prudential morality’), but each of them was uttered in an actual situation of the life of Jesus, in a particular and often unforeseen crisis. Moreover, [. . .] they were preponderantly concerned with a situation of conflict; they correct, reprove, attack: for the greater part, though not exclusively, the parables are weapons of warfare” (Jeremias 19; the embedded quotation is from C.W.F. Smith's *The Jesus of the Parables*). He concludes that understanding the parables of Jesus in their original setting and for their original purpose “compel[s Jesus'] hearers to come to a decision about his person and mission” (Jeremias 159). I suggest they also help readers understand themselves.

whereas parables reveal ideas.³ This distinction became central to twentieth-century parable studies. Scholars like Norman Perrin and Via contend that “An allegory is a narrative in which the various elements presented represent something other than themselves [. . .] A parable on the other hand is essentially a comparison whereby one thing is illuminated by being compared to another, and the parable makes its point as a totality” and that an allegory “communicates to a person what he [or she] already knows, though it communicates it in symbolic and altered fashion,” whereas “A parable is not simply an example or illustration of a general idea which makes the latter easier to understand” (Perrin, *Language* 6; Via 7, 10).⁴ That is, allegories use figurative language to illustrate commonly understood ideas, whereas parables use plain language to illustrate uncommon or unexpected ideas.

More recent parable scholarship has critiqued these earlier views. Craig Blomberg, for example, questions the differentiation between allegory and metaphor, and he suggests that older scholarship was not entirely wrong in recognizing the allegorical nature of parables: “The error of pre-modern interpreters lay in overzealous and anachronistic use of allegory, not in the method per se” (42). Modern parable scholarship helps readers understand the metaphoric language in parables, without distracting readers with a debate regarding the difference between metaphor and allegory. As Blomberg and Boucher suggest, distinguishing between parables and allegories is not as important as

³ As Frye notes, “continuous allegory prescribes the direction of his [the critic’s] commentary, and so restricts its freedom” (Frye, *Anatomy* 90).

⁴ While parables are not allegories, parables do have allegorical components, which theologians noted throughout the time Milton was writing.

recognizing parables' figurative language and how it functions to impart meaning.⁵

Parables communicate and impart meaning as they teach lessons through unanticipated comparisons. In the Biblical parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard, for example, readers are surprised to learn that the laborers who began their work at the eleventh hour were paid as much as the laborers who began their work at the first hour (Matthew 20:1-16). Readers question the text and the rationale of paying both laborers the same amount of money for unequal amounts of work. Through this process of questioning, readers learn the greater lessons of choosing to answer God's calling, as well as the lesson of God's love and justice. While narratives like this parable from Matthew "arose out of normal life situations," as Stein notes, they did not necessarily "portray normal, everyday behavior" (40). In fact, "at times Jesus' parables caught their listeners by surprise because the behavior they expected stood in sharp contrast with the behavior portrayed in the parables" (Stein 40). This analysis is important for two reasons: it acknowledges the strange familiarity of parables, and it illustrates the shocking effect this familiarity has on readers.

The familiarity of the stories told through parables, or what Wilder calls their "authentic verisimilitude," is one reason why parables are so effective at reaching readers (82). Parables affect readers, Wilder explains, because they "give us this kind of humanness and actuality. There is no romance or idealization here, no false mysticism, and no miracles, no impulse towards escape into fantasy or into sentimentality. We have stories, indeed, but they stay close to things as they are" (82). It is this semblance of

⁵ Blomberg notes, "It is not multiple points of comparison which make a narrative an allegory; any narrative with both a literal and a metaphorical meaning is in essence allegorical" (Blomberg 42).

reality that draws readers into the text. Funk also comments on the familiar aspects of parables: “The everyday imagery of the parable is vivid [. . .] because it juxtaposes the common and the uncommon, the everyday and the ultimate, but only so that each has interior significance for the other. The world of the parable is like Alice’s looking-glass world: all is familiar, yet all is strange, and the one illuminates the other” (*Language* 160). This illumination and juxtaposition of familiar and strange is precisely how a parable affects its readers. They have an “argumentative or provocative character [. . . and] they demand a decision,” Funk explains, noting that parables entangle readers “in the dilemma of the metaphor” and cause readers to question, “Should [I] proceed on this venture into strangeness or draw back?” (Funk, *Language*, 161, 162) As Funk demonstrates, readers “must choose to unfold with the story, be illuminated by the metaphor, or reject the call and abide with the conventional [understanding]” (*Language* 161-162).⁶ The intentionality of this contrast between familiar and unfamiliar ideas is central to understanding why authors tell parables: “Jesus is not merely clarifying difficult ideas. He is leading men to make a judgment and to come to a decision. The stories are so told as to compel men to see things as they are, by analogy indeed. Sluggish or dormant awareness and conscience are thus aroused. The parables make men give attention, come alive and face things” (Wilder 83).

⁶ Funk also mentions Dodd regarding a parable’s ability to “leav[e] the mind ‘in sufficient doubt about its precise application to tease it into active thought’” and he also notes Dodd’s idea that “the parable is argumentative, inducing the listener to make a judgment upon the situation set out in the parable and to apply that judgment, either explicitly or implicitly, to the matter at hand. The parable thus involves what Bultmann calls a transference of judgment” (Funk, *Language* 133-134).

Parables also are effective because they are a “means of dialogue” with the primary purpose of engaging readers (36). Specifically, Boucher asserts:

[Parables] bring about a change of mind, or better a change of heart, in the hearer, perhaps to move the hearer to conversion [. . .] The hearer of a parable can hardly remain neutral, but must accept or reject its point, must act or fail to act on the lesson. This being their purpose, the parables are *rhetorical*; they belong to the broad class of literature called rhetoric, literature which has as its purpose to effect a change in the hearer, to convince or persuade. (16)⁷

Boucher is not alone in her assessment of how parables produce a change in readers.

Funk also explains “the narrative [of a parable] is not complete until the hearer is drawn into it as participant” and he contends that “The parable invites, nay, compels him to make some response” (*Language* 214). Similarly, John Sider suggests that a parable affects readers because a parable is “a discursive or narrative analogy in the service of moral or spiritual argument” (84). As an analogy, a parable requires readers to actively

⁷ She also notes that “Jesus’ purpose in speaking in parables, then, was neither to convey information nor to enter into debate [. . .]: Jesus’ goal was to win over his audience to his view. The parable was an earnest gesture on the part of Jesus toward the audience. It was a speech-act which truly involved speaker and hearer in communication. The parables were instruments of genuine dialogue between Jesus and his audience. Jesus’ aim was to engage his hearers’ attention, to gain their assent, to enable them to adopt his view of things” (35-36). Robert Funk, likewise, suggests “the function of the parable is to draw the hearer from the one view of things to the other where he or she must submit to or resist the new ‘logic’ that contradicts the old one” (qtd. in Williams 188). Similarly, Gila Safran Naveh suggests that because “parabolic discourse has always been ‘polysemic’ (many meanings) and ‘polyphonic’ (many voices),” readers are compelled to distinguish between the competing voices in order to find the message the parabolist created in the narrative (22). As Naveh explains, “A parable never really answers the parabolic question being asked at the beginning of the narrative, [but] it teaches the addressee only to proceed in the ‘right direction’ (the direction desired by the parabolist) to solve the problems involving man and the divine” (30). Naveh also argues that “parabolic discourse is anagogical; namely, it ‘transforms’ and uplifts the addressee and changes his position vis-à-vis this discourse when he begins to understand its many layers” (26).

interpret the text and to make a personal investment in the reading and interpretation process.

In addition to involving readers through familiar images and through an engaging style, parables also bring about a change in readers through their open-endedness.

Blomberg suggests that a parable “juxtaposes two basically dissimilar objects (e.g., the kingdom of God and a mustard seed) [. . .] in which the possible lines of comparison are not as clear or limited” as the ideas expressed in an allegory, which “encodes a relatively static series of comparisons which its author wishes to communicate” (Blomberg 35).

John Donahue also discusses the importance of the open-endedness of parables, suggesting that this aspect of parables invites readers to wrestle with the text to discern its meaning.⁸ Parables are “dialogic” and engage readers; the language in parables affects readers by drawing them into the text (Donahue 18). Referencing Eta Linnemann, Donahue maintains that “parables ‘work’ because the world of the hearer is somehow reproduced in the parable” (18). Funk likewise suggests that the open-endedness of parables requires “Every hearer [. . .] to hear it in his own way” (*Language* 214). These suggestions imply that readers are invested in the story of a parable because the story is personal and individually applicable; readers learn about themselves as they invest themselves in reading.⁹ In this way, parables are like other Biblical genres, which, Leland

⁸ Donahue makes this comment as he discusses giving sermons on parables. He suggests that when preaching the parables, sermons should reflect the open-ended nature of the parables: “Perhaps the best ‘application’ in proclaiming the parables is to help people to be so captured by a biblical text that they will wonder what it really means and will wrestle with it. Like Jacob (Gen. 32: 22-32), in the struggle they may even be touched by God’s power and presence” (Donahue 216).

⁹ John Dominic Crossan also makes the relationship between readers and parables explicit: “In parable, of course, we are not outside of story, which is to be outside humanity, but we are in story at the point where it shows awareness of its own inevitability and also its own relativity. Parable shows us the seams and edges

Ryken notes, are of “a style that gives only minimal information and requires the reader to fill in the details” (“Introduction” 5).¹⁰ Erich Auerbach’s description of Biblical literature illuminates this idea. He notes that in Biblical literature, “certain parts [are] brought into high relief, [while] others [are] left obscure,” and he describes Biblical narratives as being characterized by “abruptness, suggestive influence of the unexpressed, ‘background’ quality, multiplicity of meanings and the need for interpretation, universal-historical claims, development of the concept of the historically becoming, and preoccupation with the problematic” (23). Like other Biblical genres, parables require readers to analyze the language in order to understand the story.

Beyond the linguistic elements of parables, this genre is characterized by its thematic elements.¹¹ Parables generically have the following qualities: concise narration; narration told from one perspective at a time; a limited number of characters; repetition of action; and a lack of conclusion.¹² This economy of language, straight-forward plot, small

of myth [. . .] It was to these two binary opposites within story that the literary critic Frank Kermode referred with the statement, ‘Myths are the agents of stability, fictions the agents of change.’ Parables are fictions, not myths; they are meant to change, not reassure us.” (*The Dark Interval* 56).

¹⁰ In this discussion, Ryken refers to Auerbach.

¹¹ Northrop Frye also notes the thematic elements of parables. In his explanation, the language in parables allows this genre to be read thematically. Frye explains, “When a work of fiction is written or interpreted thematically, it becomes a parable or illustrative fable” (*Anatomy of Fiction* 53).

¹² Paraphrased from Donahue 21. Boucher paraphrases the work of Rudolf Bultmann and further defines a parable as a story with the following characteristics: A narrative “told from a single perspective [. . .] We are not told what is happening off-scene”; a narrative that “has no more than two or three chief characters”; a narrative that has “Only two persons or groups speak[ing] or act[ing] in one scene”; a narrative in which “Persons are usually characterized by what they say or do” (Boucher 23-24). Robert Funk’s analysis of parables expands this definition and notes the following patterns:

- Words and expressions are used parsimoniously [. . .] Vocabulary is the simplest: there are no freighted terms, only everyday words.
- Descriptors and adjectives are kept to a minimum; characters are defined by what they do.
- Direct speech is preferred to third-person narration.
- The parsimony of words is joined by an economy of characters and conciseness of plot. Only the necessary persons appear. The plot is simple.

number of characters, and concise action repeated in various ways help us to appreciate this genre as distinct from other types of narration. These thematic elements, in conjunction with the dialogic form that compels readers' participation, offer a model for understanding *Paradise Lost* as a parable.

Paradise Lost as a Parable

As an epic poem, *Paradise Lost* does not have the parabolic attribute of concise narration, but it does contain the other key elements of parables: it is a story with a straight-forward plot and a limited number of characters; the plot is primarily told from a single perspective at a time; the action of the poem—disobeying God—is repeated through several characters' actions; and the story lacks a neat conclusion. Milton's poem also seems parabolic since it has allegoric and metaphoric elements. Parables present abstract lessons through metaphoric, allegorical language; Milton's poem uses figurative

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- There is repetition by two's and three's, and occasionally more, with variation. Together with other forms of rhythm and assonance, this [repetition] endows the prose of the parables with certain poetic qualities.
 - The narrative or story line [. . .] is divided into three parts: opening, development, and crisis-denouement. The parts are signaled by certain surface markers. The development and crisis-denouement are initiated, as a rule, by temporal sequence phrases [. . .] In other words, temporal sequence phrases indicate where the two principal subdivisions of the parable begin.
 - Affective terms expressing compassion or wrath thus appear to mark the crisis or denouement.
 - Repetition and novelty in exact measure appear to be characteristic of the narrative parables also.
 - Repetition and variation can be pursued, on a slightly smaller scale, through the parable as a whole.
 - Repetition and variation in themselves contain forms of rhythm and assonance: the parallelism of clauses with variation; the repetition of thematic phrases; the play upon theme words; and the like. It is not surprising to find such cadences and euphony in prose that borders on poetry.

These bullet points are quotations taken verbatim from Funk, *Parables and Presence* 20-28. The narrative parables Funk analyzes are the parables of "the Laborers in the Vineyard, the Talents, the Ten Maidens, the Great Supper, the Good Samaritan, and the Prodigal Son" (Funk, *Parables and Presence* 19). His purpose for studying these parables is to demonstrate that these parables "were composed in Greek," which he suggests helps readers better understand and more fully "examine the synoptic tradition" in which they were written (Funk, *Parables and Presence* 28). Although Funk's purpose is to expose the Greek heritage of the parables, his methodology also helps to identify common elements of parables; his outline of common elements is a helpful model for my study.

language to outline the consequences of making a moral decision. The figurative language in the poem provides concrete examples of the characters choosing to disobey. The characters' disobedience teaches the abstract and seemingly incongruous idea of free will. Seeing the characters' disobedience in the context of the figurative language of a parable makes this lesson of free will understandable to readers.

A few other studies have considered individual aspects of *Paradise Lost* as parabolic text. Thomas Merrill, for example, suggests that there are parabolic features of the poem and that "the mode of the parable is more active than we may realize in Milton's epic" (284). He analyses Satan's language in the poem and concludes that it functions parabolically as it "compels" readers to consider their own circumstances and brings readers to a "religious awareness" of God's justice and mercy (Merrill 291, 285). Similarly, Bryan Adams Hampton reads Satan's journey through Hell as a parabolic narrative. He suggests that the image of the "night-founder'd Skiff" in Book 1 is parabolic in the way it "becomes the crucial hermeneutical lens for readers" to learn how to interpret the epic simile and how to understand the idea of virtue in the poem (Hampton 87). Building on Merrill's and Hampton's interpretations of Satan as a didactic figure with parabolic aspects, I want to suggest that the entire poem, not simply the parts related to Satan, is parabolic. The other characters and the setting of the garden also can be interpreted parabolically and also teach readers how to understand Milton's religious ideas. Furthermore, I want to explore how the entire poem, when read as a parable, offers insight into Milton's idea of free will. Using this Biblical model of interpretation to illuminate Milton's poem demonstrates the important reciprocal applications of Biblical

and literary studies. Biblical scholars like Robert Alter use literary approaches to understand Biblical narratives and find that reading the Bible as literature is especially fruitful: “by learning to enjoy the biblical stories more fully as stories, we shall also come to see more clearly what they mean to tell us about God, man, and the perilously momentous realm of history” (Alter 189). I am suggesting that reading *Paradise Lost* as a Biblical narrative creates similar results. Reading *Paradise Lost* as a parable establishes a new way to understand the allegorical, metaphorical, and figurative language in Milton’s epic. Seeing *Paradise Lost* as a parable is a new way to understand the themes and figurative language and in Milton’s poem.

Other scholars have ably demonstrated the allegorical elements of Milton’s poem. J. M. Evans comments on the abundance of figurative language innate to the Genesis story that is evident in Milton’s poem. He describes Milton’s poem as a reflection of Biblical genres and styles, noting that “Milton incorporated the allegorical and typological as well as the literal” language of the Bible into *Paradise Lost* (Evans 219). Catherine Gimelli Martin suggests *Paradise Lost* is “ruined” allegory and argues that Milton’s poem does not reflect the traditional allegorical pattern, but rather assumes a baroque ambiguity. She contends Milton’s epic is rich in allegory, but she understands Milton’s allegory as different from typical early modern allegory. She reads the poem’s allegorical language through Walter Benjamin’s theory of allegory and asserts that *Paradise Lost* is “a baroque rupture with normative allegory” (Martin 2). Martin’s thesis encourages readers to explore the complexity and density of the language in Milton’s poem and to consider how allegory imparts meaning in the epic. Likewise, Kenneth

Borris's study *Allegory and Epic in English Renaissance Literature: Heroic Form in Sidney, Spenser, and Milton* also draws attention to how allegorical language works in Milton's poem.¹³ Borris notes that allegory was "commonly considered a definitive formal ingredient of this literary kind [epic]" (4). He explains, "Particularly in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, emphasis on social and personal usefulness as a main criterion of literary value ensured that the legitimacy and truth of allegory and allegoresis were widely thought guaranteed by their edifying import" (Borris 2). Borris suggests that Milton's use of allegory "accommodate[s] transcendental matter to the felt limitations of human language, knowledge, and poetic narrative" and that his allegorical language is "analytic and critically self-conscious" (244). He contends that Milton uses "complex allegory to address the relationship of humanity with God" and suggests that *Paradise Lost* employs "veiled forms of discourse to treat matters ascribed mysteriously sacred import [. . .] as divine initiatives inwardly structuring human experience" (Borris 245, 246).¹⁴ I agree that Milton uses language in this way; however, Milton's language is not simply allegorical, but is also parabolic. I am offering another way of reading the poem, not only as allegory, but also as parable.

In addition to the figurative language within the poem that support reading *Paradise Lost* as a parable, the generic context of the poem also encourages consideration of the

¹³ See Mindele Anne Treip and Michael Murrin as well.

¹⁴ According to Borris, "Allegory facilitates composition of such an epic by further enhancing possibilities of tact, accommodation, flexibility, and encyclopedic comprehensiveness; by mediating between doctrinal, generic, and narrative requirements; by veiling heterodoxies from those Milton would consider unworthy, or adverse to the poem's free circulation; and, as in much Renaissance literary theory, like that of Milton's nephew and pupil Edward Philips, by justifying fictional invention through evocatively figurative expression of Christian 'truths' and perceptions. Allegorical technique in *Paradise Lost* enables expression of an epistemology like Paul's, in which we see through a glass darkly, knowing only in part, but will come to see face to face, to know as we are known (1 Cor. 13:12)" (250).

poem as a parable. *Paradise Lost* is steeped in Biblical and epic tradition. It combines the prototypical creation story of the Genesis narrative with a literary tradition that has expansive qualities. As Northrop Frye explains, “The epic, as Renaissance critics understood it, is a narrative poem of heroic action, but a special kind of narrative. It also has an encyclopaedic quality in it, distilling the essence of all the religious, philosophical, political, even scientific learning of its time, and, if completely successful, [is] the definitive poem for its age” (*Return* 5). Early modern critics also understood the Bible as an encompassing text. The Bible comprises all possible modes of expression, as Barbara Kiefer Lewalski illustrates, and this encyclopedic text influenced early modern poets. Her study of Protestant lyric poetry attests to the influence of the Bible on sixteenth- and seventeenth-century authors. She notes that “Protestant poets of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries looked to the Bible and its commentators both for genre theory and for generic models for the religious lyric” (Lewalski, *Protestant Poetics* 31). Although *Paradise Lost* is not a lyric poem, and a parable is not listed in her definition of Biblical influences on lyric poetry, Lewalski’s insistence that early modern poets absorbed Biblical language and ideas is important to my thesis that *Paradise Lost* is a parable.¹⁵

Ryken also notes the importance of the Bible on Milton’s writing and demonstrates the value of reading Milton in light of Biblical texts. He explains, “Milton’s imagination was fostered to a significant degree by the Bible [. . .] Milton’s poetry is often cut from the same fabric as the Bible, displaying the same modes of perception and feeling.

¹⁵ Doerkson also recognizes Milton’s familiarity with Biblical genres: “Milton also shows his keen awareness of the literary genres of the Bible—Job as a brief epic, the Song of Solomon as ‘divine pastoral Drama,’ the ‘Apocalyps of Saint John’ as ‘the majestick image of a high and stately Tragedy,’ and the ‘frequent songs’ in the law and prophets ‘over all the kinds of Lyrick poesy . . . incomparable’ (CPW 1.813-16)” (Doerkson para. 21).

Common to both is a way of seeing and a language of expressive symbols” (Ryken, “Introduction” 25). Specifically, Ryken argues, understanding Milton’s relationship with Biblical text aids understanding of Miltonic text:

The relationship between Milton’s poetry and the Bible follows the same pattern that Milton found within Scripture itself. Milton’s poetry is consistently rooted in the Bible, not by way of static allusion but in such a way as to involve interaction or carryover between the two texts, with the second text often pushing the earlier one in a new direction. Perhaps we can say that Milton’s poetry is engaged in an ongoing dialogue with the Bible as its pre-text, applying it to a new situation, as the New Testament applies the Old. Certainly Milton’s poetry does not exist apart from the reader’s awareness of the active presence of the Bible in it. (“Introduction” 21)

Ryken’s analysis that the Bible is a generic model as well as a content source for Milton’s poetry supports my reading of *Paradise Lost* as a parable.¹⁶ Milton’s knowledge of the Bible and its genres is a primary reason to consider his poem as a parable.

¹⁶ My reading follows the newer approach to Biblical and Milton scholarship as outlined by Ryken, who identifies five ways scholarship has developed in recent years:

1. Instead of viewing the Bible as a source for Milton’s poetry, critics now consider it as an influence and model.
2. Instead of emphasizing biblical content, critics are interested in biblical genres.
3. Instead of using the Bible to identify the origin of Milton’s poetry, critics use the Bible as an interpretive context for examining the poetry.
4. Instead of finding biblical allusions in Milton’s poetry, critics conduct intertextual readings in which the important thing is the interaction between the Bible and Milton’s poetry.
5. Instead of viewing the Bible as primarily doctrinal, critics look upon it as a work of imagination. (Ryken, “Introduction” 3-4).

Ryken’s analysis declares, “The influence of the biblical style on Milton’s versification is another study that calls for exploration” (“Introduction” 8-9). My dissertation is one way to expand this study. Ryken

Milton's familiarity with Biblical exegesis also provides support for reading *Paradise Lost* as a parable. His understanding of Biblical genres and how they impart meaning was, as Golda Werman convincingly demonstrates, an influence on his poem. In her study of Milton's use of Midrashim in *Paradise Lost*, Werman explains that Midrash, "Judaic biblical exegesis [. . . which] seeks to make Scripture understandable, attractive, and relevant," is evident throughout Milton's epic (1-2). She suggests that Milton wrote his epic poem with midrashic exegesis in mind and contends that Midrash was a model for Milton's writings because this type of exegesis would have been familiar to Milton: "Protestant theologians of the Reformation relied heavily on Jewish exegesis to fill in the gap left by their rejection of Catholic tradition and authority [. . .] Both Jews and Puritans maintained that the Bible, if properly understood, contains the answer to all of life's problems, personal and civil as well as theological" (Werman 30). Furthermore, Werman reminds us that "Protestants were particularly fascinated with midrashic works; they had no exegetical traditions of their own and had rejected those of the Catholics, so they were in search of diverse and interesting commentaries to illuminate Scripture" (25). For these reasons, Midrash would have been appealing to Milton since it requires readers to grapple with complex language in order to induce the text's meaning.¹⁷

suggests undertaking such a study by comparing a book of the Bible to (an aspect of a) Miltonic text (10). I am choosing to compare a genre of the Bible to a Miltonic text.

¹⁷ Similarly, Gerald Bruns explains the power of midrash: "midrash must always seek to nourish the conflict of interpretation, not to shut it down [. . .] Closing down the dialogue by means of a final interpretation, a last word or final appeal to a rule of faith, would be to close interpretation off from human life. It would turn Torah into a dead letter, a museum piece, a monument to what people used to believe. If the Torah is to have any force as a text, it must always be situated in a culture of argument. One imagines that this would be true of any text" (200). Furthermore, Bruns notes that "Midrash is not a formal operation but a form of life lived with a text that makes claims on people. A text that makes claims upon people turns them into respondents: they are answerable to the text in a way that is qualitatively different from the answerability of disengaged observers to the scenes they wish to depict" (203).

Another appealing aspect of the interpretive demands of parables is the genre's ability to communicate simultaneously with dual audiences through figurative language. The Gospels indicate that Jesus uses parables to instruct the faithful, while obscuring the same messages from those who resist enlightenment. Jesus tells his disciples he uses parables because they reach a dual audience. They empower believers through an encoded text, while providing a superficial message to those lacking faith who "seeing see not; and hearing [. . .] hear not, neither do they understand" (Matt. 13:13). While a wide audience may read them, a more limited audience may understand them. Milton seems to allude to this idea in Book 7 with his mention of a "fit audience [. . .] though few" (7.31). This reference has inspired many interpretations. Stephen Fallon suggests that "Milton's real concern is not with men in general but with men like Milton" (188), while Stephen Dobranski argues Milton's notion of the "fit audience" has a specific meaning: "a 'fit audience' during the seventeenth century would thus signify a well-suited group of readers, as well as one that was adroit and intelligent. The added concession, 'though few,' both conveys Milton's high standards—he is willing to sacrifice his audience's size for its understanding—and provides an incentive for his readers' efforts: they can join a small, special group, 'Elect above the rest' (PL, 3.184)" (193).¹⁸ I agree with Dobranski's analysis and interpret the "few" as being able to join a collective Christian audience. I read the "fit audience [. . .] though few" in light of the

¹⁸ Dobranski also contends that Milton was "working out of a literary convention that demanded active, rational readers. Such an audience would participate directly in the texts they perused and forge a collaborative relationship with writers" (191-192). Dobranski notes the early modern concern with readers, citing Milton's predecessors and contemporaries who also appealed to a kind, thoughtful audience and linking their concerns partly to "the Protestant practice of reading the Bible introspectively—what Dayton Haskin has called the 'classic Protestant hermeneutics' of 'inward-looking reading'" (194).

parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard, where Jesus explains to his disciples that “many [will] be called, but few chosen” (Matt. 20:16). This specification of a focused audience calls readers to be part of the larger Christian community, while at the same time it makes the story individual and personal, which is an essential function of parables.

Milton certainly understood himself through reading parables on an individual level. In his recent dissertation, David Urban examines the way Milton associates himself with Biblical parabolic figures.¹⁹ In this study, Urban contends that “Milton sets himself up as a teacher who fits into the category of a ‘Scribe instructed to the kingdom of heaven,’ who thus is able to reveal the genuine truth of the Scriptures in spite of past interpretive mistakes” (*Parabolic Milton* 15). His premise is that “Milton is indeed a poet and prose writer of the self [. . .] whose understanding of the biblical parables is, as with the Bible as a whole, intensely personal in nature” and that Milton, “by means of his self-identification with figures from certain biblical parables, constructs a ‘self’ in relation to the biblical text and his relationship to it and to God himself” (Urban, *Parabolic Milton* 18-19). Urban suggests that one reason Milton felt compelled to write poetry was his personal connection with parabolic lessons. In “The Talented Mr. Milton: A Parabolic Laborer and His Identity,” Urban discusses Milton’s fascination and concern with the parables of the Talents and the Laborers in the Vineyard. He reads Sonnet 7 and its accompanying letter as evidence of Milton’s conflict about being called to the ministry

¹⁹ My dissertation builds on the work David Urban has done on Milton’s relationship with parables. Urban discusses Milton’s fascination and identification with the parables of the Talents and the Laborers in the Vineyard, his conflict about being called to the ministry versus his ambitions as a poet, and his reliance upon Biblical lessons to sustain his faith. Urban suggests that parables helped Milton experience the depths of his Christianity. My study will use Urban’s analysis as a foundation for examining how *Paradise Lost* is itself a parable.

versus his ambitions as a poet, and his reliance upon Biblical lessons to sustain his faith. He notes lines 3-4 (“My hasting dayes flie on with full career, / But my late spring no bud or blossom shew’th”) and 13-14 (“All is, if I have grace to use it so, / As ever in my great task Masters eye”) to show Milton’s angst about being a poet. Urban argues the parabolic reference in Sonnet 7 acknowledges Milton can achieve “a freedom that allows him to wait and prepare apart from the fear of being judged an unprofitable servant” (“Talented” 3).

Another important parabolic reference is Milton’s allusion to the parable of the Talents in Sonnet 19. Milton expresses his sense of anxiety regarding his chosen profession in lines 3-5: “And that one Talent which is death to hide, / Lodg’d with me useless, though my Soul more bent / To serve therewith my Maker.” Dayton Haskin comments on these lines, noting “It is now quite generally supposed that the parable [of the Talents] influenced in a decisive way the choice of a poetic vocation in which Milton, after having been ‘Church-outed by the Prelats’ (CPW, I, 823), could use his uncommon gifts to fulfill his natural abilities” (29). Through *Paradise Lost*, Milton fulfills his service to God because the poem enables him to fully use his talents. Poetry was an important means through which Milton fulfilled his purpose: it was a way for Milton to “achieve greatness in his art,” as well as a way for him to use his talents (Urban, “Talented” 5). Likewise, poetry offered Milton an opportunity to create a parable, “a vehicle of grace that offers relief from past failures and divine hope for an uncertain future” (Urban, “Talented” 8). As Urban suggests, parables helped Milton experience the depths of Christianity. Urban’s argument is an important starting point for my own because it

establishes Milton's connection with parables, which is an important foundation for my argument that *Paradise Lost* is a parable. Milton's affinity for parables, his repeated allusion to them, and his use of parables as vehicles to address his anxiety and his mission are foundational to my understanding of *Paradise Lost* as a parable. I want to suggest that Milton wrote in parabolic language because parables were important to him on a personal level.

Additionally, Milton would have been drawn to parables because this genre offered Milton a way to demonstrate his talent as a poet and rhetorician. Parables exhibit the ability of the parabolist because this complex genre requires skill. As Perrin has noted, parables are complex narratives:

All the elements in a parable relate to each other within the parable, and the structure of their connections and relationships is determined 'by the author's creative composition' [. . .] As aesthetic objects the parables are self-contained literary objects within which various elements are carefully integrated into a patterned whole. It is within 'their pattern of connections' that their meaning is to be found, and interpretation must begin by observing this internally coherent pattern, rather than by immediately looking to something outside of it. ("Modern Interpretation" 145)

In addition to the complexity and demanding structure of parables, the radical nature of parables would have appealed to Milton's sensibilities. Bernard Harrison argues that Biblical parables "confute [. . .] a certain religious outlook, and they confute it by announcing and adumbrating an eschatology which that outlook in no way prepares its

adherents to receive” (191). Harrison explains that through Biblical parables, Jesus shares his radical message that the Kingdom of God is expressed in the unlikely help of the Good Samaritan and in the unappreciated faith of little children, despite what the Jewish leaders profess. Biblical parables challenge the beliefs and practices of the rabbinic leadership: “The parables announce different aspects of the eschatological crisis, revealing the nature of the Kingdom of God now realised or in process of realising itself; and they accuse the ‘scribes and Pharisees,’ the religious leaders who are blind to the nature of the crisis, and unwilling to accept the Kingdom now that it is here” (Harrison 192). This model of parables as a radical genre that counters establishment thinking while promoting a godly agenda is Milton’s prototype. It emphasizes the ideas set forth in reformed thinking—that individuals have the right and duty to follow Jesus’ teachings and to form their own opinions and beliefs, regardless of the ideas promoted by church leadership. In this way, parables validate the ideas of independent thinking that Milton champions.

As a parable, Milton’s poem works like Biblical parables: it reveals knowledge that is inaccessible through other means of learning. Wilder discusses the “revelatory character” of Biblical parables and notes that through the figurative language of parables “we have an image with a certain shock to the imagination which directly conveys [a] vision of what is signified” (80). Readers are shocked as they compare their theoretical, book knowledge to their experiential knowledge of free will. It is the dissonance readers feel when reading *Paradise Lost* that enables them to better understand free will and God.

Crossan illustrates how parables are an important means of gaining knowledge of God: “[Parables] are stories which shatter the deep structure of our accepted world [. . .] They remove our defenses and make us vulnerable to God. It is only in such experiences that God can touch us, and only in such moments does the kingdom of God arrive” (*Dark Interval* 122). It is this vulnerability that leads to knowledge. Like Biblical parables, *Paradise Lost* shocks readers and makes them vulnerable to God by depicting God from the perspectives of Satan, Adam, and Eve. These characters’ interactions with each other and with God form the primary message of Milton’s parable: a lesson of free will.

The idea that *Paradise Lost* also prompts readers to participate in the story is a familiar topic in Milton studies. John Halkett, for example, notes that Milton’s poem requires “a certain consonance between the opinions of the poet and audience” (141). Similarly, Joseph Summers argues in *The Muse’s Method* that readers of *Paradise Lost* must be able to “respond [to] and imagine” the poem; “the poem must evoke our ordinary responses and then redirect them, or block them, or transcend them” (Summers 13, 23). Summers claims that Milton achieves this goal of forcing readers to actively consider the poem because “No human quality or achievement is presented apart from its relationship to a state of mind and heart, to action, and to a total context of good and evil; it is only through such relationships, Milton believed, that events and qualities achieve moral status and human significance” (28). While Summers does not argue that the poem is a parable, his ideas do support my argument that *Paradise Lost* is a parable. Not only do readers have to respond to the poem’s language and moral arguments, but also they have to interpret the purpose of the language and arguments. They have to understand what

Milton is saying and why he is saying it in a manner consistent with interpreting parabolic language.

I am suggesting that *Paradise Lost* engages readers and requires them to respond to the poem in a manner consistent with how they would respond to a parable. In this way, my dissertation builds on previous Milton scholarship that uses reader response theory as an interpretive lens for understanding *Paradise Lost*. Reader response theory addresses the relationship between a text and its readers and acknowledges that readers contribute to the text's meaning. As Stanley Fish explains, "the proper object of analysis is not the work, but the reader [. . . because] the work as an object tends to disappear—and that any method of analysis which ignores the affective reality of the reading experience cuts itself off from the source of literary power and meaning" (Fish, *Self-Consuming* 4). Specifically referring to *Paradise Lost*, Fish contends that "there is no escape in the poem from the truth about oneself, which is finally its subject" and that "Milton's purpose is to educate the reader to an awareness of his position and responsibilities as a fallen man," which he does through causing the reader to "fall again" with Adam and Eve through reading the poem (*Surprised* xi, 1). I suggest that readers are part of the subject of *Paradise Lost* because they are participating in the poem as readers of a parable. Parables are narratives that exemplify reader response theory; as John Drury explains, "parables lead us into morality and stay with us while we think about it" (Drury 434).²⁰

²⁰ Reader response is appropriate for analyzing Milton's texts because it relies on individual assessment of and reaction to a text, which is an especially Protestant approach to reading and an approach Milton espouses in his writings. As Paul Fiddes explains, "the Lutheran emphasis upon individual justification by faith results in art forms in which the element of personal expression joins with imitation of nature. The

While I am taking an approach to *Paradise Lost* that is similar to Fish's model, my reading of the poem differs from his. Like Fish, I understand that reading *Paradise Lost* can be a "means of confirming" readers' faith (*Surprised* 55); however, I do not think that readers must undergo a process of temptation and corruption in order to reach an understanding of their faith. Fish argues that "Milton consciously wants to worry his reader, to force him to doubt the correctness of his responses, and to bring him to the realization that his inability to read the poem with any confidence in his own perception is its focus" and he suggests that throughout *Paradise Lost* Milton engages in a "programme of reader harassment" (*Surprised* 4). I contend that Milton's poem engages readers in the text, but I do not see Milton as being abusive to readers. My reader response approach is more aligned with the one Lewalski identifies in *Paradise Lost and the Rhetoric of Literary Forms*. For Lewalski, Milton functions as a "rhetor" who "employ[s] carefully designed literary strategies to elicit these responses" (Lewalski, *Rhetoric of Literary Forms* 7-8). In this way, Milton does not act as "a rigorous and punitive teacher, forcing readers into frequent and inevitable mistakes in reading and thereby causing them to recognize and reenact their own fallenness [. . . Rather,] he embodies instead the pedagogic ideal in *Of Reformation*, advancing his readers' understanding through a literary regimen at once intellectually demanding and delightful" (Lewalski, *Rhetoric of Literary Forms* 8). James Grantham Turner makes a similar assessment: "[Milton's] own conception of the engaged reader and the confrontatory reading-process, expressed not only in *Areopagitica* but throughout his prose, leads him

writer, with 'authorial authority' offers his inner feelings about the world that he assumes we all know and will recognize" (Fiddes 17).

to create an equally involved reader for his own epic, bound to the Genesis-myth not just by guilty complicity in fallen emotion, but by the capacity to share ‘in some proportion’ the erotic dream of Paradise” (Turner 9). I agree with Lewalski and Turner, and I read Milton’s poem as a narrative that kindly invites readers to choose to act according to God’s will and that teaches readers to better understand God’s grace.

Through reading complex texts, like parables, readers learn the process of reading analytically and with consideration, which allows them to make informed choices. Just as Nathan’s parable of the poor man with only one ewe that was taken by the rich man with many sheep enabled David to recognize the nature of his relationship with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12), Milton’s parable offers (early) modern readers an empowered understanding of the relationship between reader and text.²¹ This parable in 2 Samuel “disarm[s]” readers, just as it persuaded David (Stein 35). As Stein notes, Nathan’s use of parable involved David in the story, whereas a direct confrontation may have elicited David’s anger at Nathan rather than at himself and may have resulted in David ignoring Nathan’s message (Stein 35). Other parables work in similar ways. They employ images and details that enable readers to grasp the parable’s message in a personal way and to view themselves in a new way upon reading the parable. My thesis is that *Paradise Lost* works as a parable in this way. The poem uses the familiar theme of the creation story in

²¹Interpreting *Paradise Lost* through the parabolic genre is a logical theoretical approach to the poem because parables were recognizable to Milton’s audience. His readers would have heard homilies on the parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:1-23, Mark 4:1-20, and Luke 8:1-15), the parable of the fruitless fig tree (Matthew 21:18-22, Mark 11:12-14, 20-24, and Luke 13:6-9), the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32), the parable of the Ten Virgins (Matthew 25:1-13), the parable of the Marriage Feast (Matthew 22:1-14 and Luke 14:16-24), the parable of the Wheat and the Tares (Matthew 13:24-30), and the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31), which taught lessons on knowing and understanding the word and will of God, faith, repentance and grace, eschatology, the Kingdom of God, and the afterlife. Parables convey these ideas as they depict divine and human relationships that teach faithful readers how to use free will in order to live a moral, reasonable life.

Genesis, but the poem tells the story in a radical way that requires readers to involve themselves in the plot. As we read the poem, we perceive the importance of the poem's lesson for our own lives and we also understand ourselves in a new way as a result of reading the poem. Seeing ourselves in a new way enables us to see our faults, as Fish suggests in *Surprised by Sin*, but also enables us to see our potential and our "paradise within," the happiness we can achieve by recognizing that our post-lapsarian state is happier than our unfallen state. The happiness in our post-lapsarian existence, Milton teaches through his parable, derives from using free will.

Part Two: Free Will

John Ulreich concludes that Milton's point in *Paradise Lost* is that "in spite of the Fall, man has it in his power to become happier than he *had been* in Paradise" ("A Paradise Within" 358). He suggests that there was apparent perfection within the Garden: "In Eden, there was perfect harmony between Adam and Eve, between the physical and the spiritual, the passionate and reasonable parts of their nature" and that the Fall disrupted this harmony ("A Paradise Within" 359). However, he further suggests that humans can regain this harmony by using their free will and their humanity as a means of experiencing divinity. That is, humans can restore this harmony through self-reflection and using free will to align their wills with God's will and to become more like God. This behavior constitutes submissive freedom, a choice humans make, through self-reflection, to consciously align their actions with God's will. It requires an awareness of self and a realization that submission to God does not equate to a loss of self, but an enhancement of it. This enhancement derives from knowing God, obeying God, and aspiring to become

more like God. Ulreich explains that Adam and Eve fall because “Their disobedience consists, not in their aspiration, but in the way they try to fulfill themselves, by denying God: rather than know God in themselves, they make a false god outside themselves [. . . .] Obedience enables man to imitate God, not only to be like Him but to become *more* like Him” (“A Paradise Within” 362).

The concepts of free will and submission seem contradictory, but as Milton indicates throughout *Paradise Lost*, they form a concept of submissive freedom that is congruous, beneficial, and attainable. Throughout the poem Milton defines freedom through characters in seemingly unequal relationships. The angels are ranked according to “Cherub and Seraph, Potentates and Thrones, / And Vertues, [and] winged Spirits” (7.198-199), Eve is created “not equal” to Adam (4.296), and God is elevated above all in “the pure Empyrean where he sits / High Thron’d above all highth” (3.57-58), yet all are free. These hierarchical relationships do not preclude opportunities for freedom. W. Gardner Campbell calls this idea of freedom “mutually enriching” and notes that, for Milton, subordination and individual authority are not mutually exclusive: “Milton continually insists on both equality *and* degree, just as he proclaims both obedience *and* freedom” (52-53). Making a similar point, Diane Kelsey McColley argues that the hierarchy Milton presents in the poem is not an arrangement of subjection, but of mutuality: “Wherever beings are arranged in orders, the arrangement is made for the augmentation of each member, for greater individuation through manifold relations, and for the greater splendor of their mutual joy” (*Milton’s Eve* 39). Armand Himy also notes the transformative role of mutuality and obedience in *Paradise Lost*: “Worship is an art

of positive transfiguration. He who cannot obey cannot be free and consequently cannot command. Worship must be the bond between the Creator and the creatures [. . .] Obedience is not subjection. It is the condition for redemption” (121). These interpretations of the relationships in *Paradise Lost* demonstrate the logic that obedience does not mean loss of authority. Quite the opposite, obedience and submission lead to freedom and authority. As Joan Bennett explains, Milton believed “all men’s freedom ultimately consisted in their submission to God’s will [. . . He argues that] God does not remove his subjects’ ability to will their own actions and obedience, that their freedom consists in their ability to obey or disobey his law” (51). Milton illustrates this precept through Adam, Eve, and Satan, who become examples through whom Milton calls readers to submit to God’s will and to know freedom, which, as Dennis Danielson illustrates, is “meaningful precisely because there is more than one option: man is morally free to fall only *because* he is sufficient to stand” (674). Milton’s purpose in “justif[ying] the wayes of God to men” is to teach his readers how to find freedom through obedience to God’s will.

The idea of freedom permeates *Paradise Lost*. There is at least one reference to “freedom,” “free will,” or being “free” in every book of the poem.²² Freedom, for Milton, is a spiritual state of being that derives from having free will. Free will is a struggle between acting according to individual desire or acting in accordance with God’s will. Milton begins to define his views on free will in the Proem to Book 3 as he explains that

²² References observed in John Bradshaw’s *A Concordance to the Poetical Works of John Milton*, Hamden: Archon Books, 1965. As Mollenkott notes, “No doctrine is more vital to Milton than that of freedom of the will both in God and in His creatures” (114).

God “clears his own Justice and Wisdom from all imputation, having created Man free and able enough to have withstood his Tempter; yet declares his purpose of grace towards him, in regard he fell not of his own malice, as did *Satan*, but by him seduc’t” (415).

Within Book 3, Milton addresses the role of free will in the Fall. God tells the Son that Satan “had of mee / All he could have; I made him just and right, / Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall” (3.97-99) and iterates that Satan and the fiends used their free will to choose to be disobedient (3.08-119). He distinguishes between foreknowledge and predestination to emphasize the role of the individual in determining his or her own fate: “they themselves decreed / Thir own revolt, not I: if I foreknew, / Foreknowledge had no influence on their fault” (3.116-118). God further reveals that the fallen are “Authors to themselves in all / Both what they judge and what they choose; for so / I formd them free, and free they must remain” (3.122-124). Milton makes it clear that while God “ordain’d / Thir freedom, they themselves ordain’d thir fall” (3.127-128).

Milton contends Adam and Eve had free will as well. God directs Raphael to instruct Adam about the “Happiness in his power left free to will” and to remind Adam that “his Will though free, / [is] Yet mutable” (5.235-237). Raphael tells Adam:

God made thee perfet, not immutable;
 And good he made thee, but to persevere
 He left it in thy power, ordaind thy will
 By nature free, not over-rul’d by Fate
 Inextricable, or strict necessity;
 Our voluntarie service he requires,

Not our necessitated, such with him
 Finds no acceptance, nor can find, for how
 Can hearts, not free, be tri'd whether they serve
 Willing or no, who will but what they must
 By Destinie, and can no other choose? (5.524-534)

Through this instruction, Raphael makes clear that God gives humans free will that they might freely choose obedience. His rhetorical question prompts readers to consider the implications of free will and to consider how this kind of free obedience is linked to their understanding of themselves and their relationships with God.

One of the most important lessons of free will in *Paradise Lost* comes not from hearing angelic lessons on the subject, but from observing Adam and Eve's experience with it. In Book 9, Adam and Eve learn the investment of self in making a decision. Eve misunderstands the point of free will. She reasons, "inferior who is free?," and freely chooses to eat the fruit Satan offers her (9.825). Similarly, Adam freely chooses to eat the fruit Eve offers him. Of course, while these choices to eat the fruit are freely made, they are wrongly made because they are made to achieve selfish desires. What Adam, Eve, and readers learn from this experience is that free will leads to gratification when it is used to align personal desires with God's will. When free will is employed in this way, the result is liberating.

Milton describes this liberating experience in *On Christian Doctrine* when he explains, "Christ writes the inward law of God by his Spirit on the heart of believers, and

leads them as willing followers” (YP 6:535).²³ This Spirit-led freedom is the basis for Milton’s understanding of Christian liberty, which he defines as the process whereby “CHRIST OUR LIBERATOR FREES US FROM THE SLAVERY OF SIN AND THUS FROM THE RULE OF THE LAW AND OF MEN, AS IF WE WERE EMANCIPATED SLAVES. HE DOES THIS SO THAT, BEING MADE SONS INSTEAD OF SERVANTS AND GROWN MEN INSTEAD OF BOYS, WE MAY SERVE GOD IN CHARITY THROUGH THE GUIDANCE OF THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH” (YP 6:537). Milton presumed that “all men naturally were borne free, being the image and resemblance of God himself” and thus each has the right to govern himself (*Tenure* 1060). For Milton, being made free and in the image of God implied that humans had the capacity to reasonably use free will. As Frye explains, “Liberty for Milton is not something that starts with man: it starts with God. It is not something that man naturally wants for himself, but something God is determined he shall have; man cannot want it unless he is in a regenerate state, prepared to accept the inner discipline and responsibility that go with it” (Frye, *Return* 85). Milton demonstrates this sense of responsibility that freedom brings in his definition of “the true warfaring Christian,” who must use his free will to explore the symbiotic nature of good and evil and to make decisions. As Milton illustrates in *Areopagitica*, knowing the difference between good and evil, and

²³ References to Christian Doctrine are taken from the Complete Prose Works of John Milton and are cited parenthetically in the text as YP, with volume and page number.

intentionally choosing good, is practicing God's will and Christian liberty:

Good and evill we know in the field of this World grow up together almost inseparably; and the knowledge of good is so involv'd and interwoven with the knowledge of evill, and in so many cunning resemblances hardly to be discern'd, that those confused seeds which were impos'd on Psyche as an incessant labour to cull out, and sort asunder, were not more intermixt. It was from out the rinde of one apple taste, that the knowledge of good and evill as two twins cleaving together leapt forth into the World. And perhaps this is that doom which Adam fell into of knowing good and evill, that is to say of knowing good by evill. As therefore the state of man now is; what wisdom can there be to choose, what continence to forbear without the knowledge of evill? He that can apprehend and consider vice with all her baits and seeming pleasures, and yet abstain, and yet distinguish, and yet prefer that which is truly better, he is the true warfaring Christian. (1006)

Significantly, distinguishing between good and evil is a theme in Biblical parables as well. Noting Milton's ideas in *Areopagitica*, U. Milo Kaufmann explains that Milton's comment regarding twinned "Good and evil, growing inseparably in the 'field of this world' point to two of Jesus' parables which comment upon the conditioning of human choices" (38). He mentions Matthew 13:1-9 (the parable of the Sower) and 24-30 (the parable of the Wheat and the Tares) to note that Jesus highlights the importance of knowing how to choose well (Kaufmann 38). As Jesus' parables and *Areopagitica*

demonstrate, the ability to use free will to know good by knowing evil is part of the interpretive process; choosing between good and evil brings into focus the values and ideals that define a person.

Milton further develops this idea in *On Christian Doctrine*. In his description of what Christian doctrine is, Milton quotes Acts 4:19: “decide for yourselves whether it is right in the sight of God to obey you rather than God” (YP 6:127). To demonstrate his point, Milton again echoes the parables of the Laborer and the Tares. He explains, “God offers all his rewards not to those who are thoughtless and credulous, but to those who labor constantly and seek tirelessly after truth [. . . and] it is in the interests of the Christian religion that men should be free not only to sift and winnow any doctrine, but also openly to give their opinions of it and even to write about it, according to what each believes” (YP 6:120-122). For this reason, Milton found thoughtless behavior incongruent with right reason. Robert Hoopes defines right reason in its simplest terms. Right reason, he suggests, “denotes [. . .] a mode of knowing, a way of doing, and a condition of being” (Hoopes 1). He explains that “when Milton talks about right reason, he is thinking of a faculty in man which distinguishes between good and evil and thereby actually controls ‘many lesser faculties that serve / Reason as chief.’ Among those faculties is the will, which, so long as it follows reason, remains free [. . .] The central meaning of all of Milton’s major works is the same: freedom consists in obedience to reason” (Hoopes 191, quoting *Paradise Lost* 5.101-102). Lieb offers a similar definition:

[Right reason is] a distinctly superior faculty, the kind of reason that has been ‘morally purified.’ As a moral and indeed spiritual phenomenon, the

faculty of reason is deemed 'right' insofar as it seeks 'the knowledge of absolute Truth, that is, the Truth of Christianity.' Essential to the formulation of right reason, then, is the intimate association of *recta ratio* with the categories of good and bad behavior, that is, with the awareness of the difference between right and wrong. (66)

Knowing the difference between right and wrong and deliberately choosing right is a central facet of Milton's conception of free will.

Furthermore, Milton explains, right reason demands that each individual listens to his or her conscience, an internal authority, which is a complement to the Gospel. Milton argues the Gospel provides both external justification of faith, which is "the written word," and an internal justification of faith, which is "the individual possession of each man" (YP 6:587). Lewalski asserts that Milton accepted "the New Testament description of all God's people as 'a royal Priesthood' (1 Pet. 2:9) [that] grants every Christian the liberty and right to believe and worship as the Spirit directs" ("Milton and Idolatry" 214-215). This kind of Christian community was possible, reformers argued, because the Gospel enables each believer to understand the tenets of his or her faith and to consciously live accordingly. The Gospel was the "inner light," or as Patrick Collinson calls it, the "inner momentum," which guided Protestant living (12). Following this inner light, Milton proclaims in *On Christian Doctrine*, "God has revealed the way of eternal salvation only to the individual faith of each man, and demands of us that any man who wishes to be saved should work out his beliefs for himself" (YP 6:118). He accepted the notion that believers' internal authority is derived from a combination of faith, the "spirit

which inwardly persuades each believer,” and conscience, or right reason (YP 6:590). Conscience “speak[s] from time to time in the heart of every man, reminding him, however unwilling he may be to remember it, that a God does exist, that he rules and governs all things, and that everyone must one day render to him an account of his actions, good and bad alike” (YP 6:132). As Bennett observes:

[Milton] believed that the inner light is Christ in the self, rectifying reason (*De Doctrina*, CPW 6:477-84). In Milton’s interpretation right reason is supreme over the codified law; and he believed that the revelations granted by the indwelling spirit are always consonant with reason. But, as we learn from reading Milton’s *Art of Logic*, reason is not simply ratiocination, not merely logic; reason operates on different levels to attain knowledge of reality: on the intuitive level of the angels and sometimes of humans; on the noetic and dianoetic level of reasoning from axioms alone; and on the level of such elaborate aids to insight as the syllogism and its extensions—what we call discursive reasoning. (109)

Milton models this kind of reasoning and argumentation throughout *Paradise Lost*, which offers readers an opportunity to work out their beliefs through his poem. Milton uses the characters’ thoughts and arguments to teach readers how to reach conclusions by relying on reason and thoughtful analysis, instead of by depending on mere feeling or intuition. Through this reasoning and decision-making process, readers realize their freedom.

Part Three: Overview of Chapters

In order to demonstrate how *Paradise Lost* is a parable that teaches a lesson of free will, I will look at the roles of the garden and the characters in the poem. Chapter Two will show how the garden is a lens for interpreting the poem as a parable. The Garden of Eden is an important setting for the poem because we read the poem through the garden. That is, we can understand the plot and the characters through the landscape in which the plot occurs and in which the characters exist, as well as by considering how the landscape teaches us to read the poem. Learning to read the language that describes the garden enables us to learn to interpret the lesson of the poem.

The garden instructs readers how to interpret and understand the poem by showing us how to read the layout of Eden. We learn how to read the poem by considering Eden's connection to early modern garden theory, which promoted the creation of elaborate designs that served as physical metaphors for garden-goers to interpret. These designs and metaphors, as Roy Strong explains, constituted of "a series of separate yet interconnected intellectual and physical experiences which required the mental and physical co-operation of the visitor as he moved through them" (20). This "movement" acknowledges not only the paths built into the landscape, but also the mental progression created by experiencing the variety of elements within the garden. Milton's garden does not consist of the formal, architectural patterns that dominated his contemporary landscape gardens, but it does function in ways similar to these contemporary gardens as it requires readers to mentally move through the landscape by

considering the details of the garden. In this way, Milton's Eden is a tool that teaches readers how to interpret the parable of *Paradise Lost*.

Additionally, the garden instructs us how to read the action of the plot in the garden. Eden is an important landscape because through it we observe, from a Christian perspective, the paradigm of human experience. As such, it prompts readers to consider themselves in relation to the garden. Through this landscape, readers become acutely aware of the decisions they face and the consequences of their decisions. Readers observe how the characters in the poem freely make choices; they understand that Adam, Eve, and Satan can choose to make decisions that complement God's will, or they can choose to make decisions that oppose God's will.²⁴ This knowledge illustrates how Eden is more than a background setting for the events in the poem; rather, it is central to the poem's action, and it is the context in which the characters and readers learn lessons of free will.

Milton's poem uses garden imagery as figurative language to be interpreted in order to demonstrate how Adam and Eve's pruning the abundant vegetation in Eden is a metaphor for using free will and aligning their behavior with God's will. Eve entreats Adam to allow them to "choose" their gardening and proposes, "Let us divide our labours," an act that is explicitly linked with using free will later in their conversation (9.214). In *Paradise Lost*, the act of Adam and Eve's landscaping not only molds the garden, but also molds the first pair as it provides them the opportunity to use free will. In this way, the garden also serves as the setting where Adam and Eve exercise their free

²⁴The Son, as savior, does submit to God's will and is free. My dissertation does not spend a lot of time focusing on the Son. He is important as another point of contrast between Satan, Adam, and Eve, but he doesn't prompt self-reflection as the other characters do.

will in their disobedience. Their experience in the garden demonstrates the importance of the garden setting in the poem, and provides readers with an opportunity to learn how to read the characters' experiences in the garden as part of Milton's parable.

Reading *Paradise Lost* as a parable also allows for a new appreciation of the poem's characters, which we will discuss in Chapters Three and Four. My approach in these two chapters is to read *Paradise Lost* with an awareness of the parable of the Prodigal Son. The parable of the (Lost) Prodigal Son is part of a set of parables in Luke 15 (which also includes the parables of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin), and while all three parables have similar characteristics, the parable of the Prodigal Son is the best model for interpreting *Paradise Lost* because it depicts relationships between a father and his sons, which resemble the relationships between God and Satan and God and Adam and Eve in Milton's poem.²⁵ Both the Biblical parable and Milton's poem denote a father figure who has a relationship with an older son (represented by Satan in *Paradise Lost*) and a younger son (represented by Adam and Eve in *Paradise Lost*). The parable of the Prodigal Son is a valuable tool because it teaches a single lesson by presenting two different viewpoints—those of the older and younger sons—that comment on the actions of the father. The father's warm reception of his reckless younger son incites ire from the dutiful older son and elicits surprise from readers. Readers have empathy for both sons, but readers' understanding of both sons is ultimately shaped by the actions of the father.

²⁵ This Lukan parable is also a good model because the Gospel of Luke places emphasis on God's plans for humanity and God's graciousness. It also demonstrates concern for humanity and the relationship God has with his people. See Drury 433.

As Donahue explains, “Though the two sons evoke the most emotional response [. . .] it is chiefly the father who gives shape to the drama [, . . . which] arises from observing not only what the father does but what the sons will do. The text engages us primarily at the point of dialogue between the father and the sons, so that the dynamics of human relationships provide the field of comparison for the parable” (152-153). Seeing the characters’ reactions to each other and observing the relationship between the father and his sons determines how readers understand the lesson of the parable. The parabolic message is imparted because, Donahue argues, “the father shatters the self-identity of both sons. Both define sonship in terms of servile obligations; each in his own way destroys the family. The parable does not allow this to happen but redefines the conditions under which ‘family’ can happen. A relationship with the father worked out in terms of servility leads to destruction. The relationship as redefined by the father leads to life and joy” (157). Milton’s poem imparts his lesson of free will and obedience in a similar way. Like the sons in the parable, Satan, Adam, and Eve are invited to “make merry, and be glad”; Satan acts like the older son, questioning the father’s actions, whereas Adam and Eve act like the younger son, showing contrition after their wrongdoing (Luke 15:32). Likewise, Satan sees his relationship to God in terms of servitude and feels that obedience is a form of subjugation, whereas Adam and Eve discover that obedience and freedom are not mutually exclusive states of being.

To understand how these contrary experiences and perspectives work in the poem, we should read Milton’s text as we would read the parable in Luke. As Blomberg explains, “it is helpful to listen to the parable three times, trying to understand the action

from the perspective of a different character each time. But any attempt to exclude a particular perspective loses sight of a key teaching of Jesus” (174). He suggests that the lesson of the Prodigal Son parable is told through the unique perspectives of the three main characters—the father, the older son, and the younger son. Similarly, Donahue outlines the questions readers must ask when reading this parable: “Whose story is it? What is the central thrust of the parable? What character shapes the narrative?” (152) These questions are important for considering Milton’s text as well, and approaching his poem from the various perspectives of the characters is a useful tool for interpreting the text. I suggest that readers discern the lesson in the parable of *Paradise Lost* through the unique perspectives and experiences of the three main characters, Satan, Adam, and Eve.²⁶ As in other parables, the characters in *Paradise Lost* provide antithetical points of view to teach the same lesson. In Milton’s poem, Satan, Adam, and Eve offer three different perspectives on the lesson of free will; the combination of these perspectives enables readers to gain a fuller understanding of this abstract topic. Using the parable of the Prodigal Son as a model, I will explore the unique perspective of each character and explain how reading the poem with this three-pronged approach offers readers insight into the concept of free will, which they cannot gain through a single perspective.²⁷ I am

²⁶ We could also discuss and examine the point of view of God; however, for my dissertation it is more fruitful to talk about the characters who receive God’s grace, not the being who is imparting grace. Readers cannot relate to God as they can to Satan, Adam, and Eve.

²⁷ The parable of the Prodigal Son is also a good model for my analysis because the idea of freedom is inherent to the message of the story. As Donahue argues, the parable of the Prodigal Son demonstrates that “A relationship with the father worked out in terms of servility leads to destruction. The relationship as redefined by the father leads to life and joy”; Milton’s poem teaches this idea as well through the lesson of free will (157). Donahue does not use the term free will in his analysis, but his understanding of the parable is useful for interpreting free will in *Paradise Lost*. Book 3 of Milton’s poem makes clear that the characters do not have a relationship with the Father that is based on servility and servitude; rather, they

not suggesting that *Paradise Lost* is a revision of the Prodigal Son parable; rather, I am suggesting that this parable provides a model through which readers can understand Milton's parable. I am proposing that we look at Milton's characters and their roles in a new way—as complementary parts of a parabolic narrative—to better see how they function in *Paradise Lost*. By examining them as parabolic figures, we see how they help readers understand themselves in relation to a broader, universal experience as humans and how they teach readers the logic of the abstract concept of free will.

In Chapter Three, we will consider how Satan is similar to the older son in the parable of the Prodigal Son and how acknowledging this perspective contributes to readers' understandings of the lesson of the poem. As the older brother in the Biblical parable feels anger and incredulity at the father's positive reaction to the younger son, Satan feels anger and disbelief at God's declaration that to the Son "shall bow / All knees in Heav'n, and shall confess him Lord" (5.607-608). While readers of both texts feel empathy for the younger son, they also pause to consider the justice of the father's action and how this response affects the older son. Satan's response causes readers to consider the justice of God's decrees. By considering the way the father's actions affect the older son, readers better understand both the older son and the father. By examining the way God's decree affects Satan, readers better comprehend Satan's actions and God's free will.

Satan teaches Milton's lesson on free will through his lonely position in the world, by acting deliberately disobediently, and by choosing not to align his will with

have free will to choose their behavior. Adam and Eve choose to repent and to obey God, which leads to life and joy, whereas Satan chooses to reject God, which makes him a servant and leads to his unhappiness.

God's will. His position and his actions make Satan a key parabolic figure; they offer a contrasting perspective to other positions and actions in the poem. They also demonstrate Satan's nature, which affects readers in a parabolic way. Satan also is an important figure in Milton's parable because he is like readers. He does not have unfettered access to the prelapsarian garden, like Adam and Eve, and he is not perfect and beyond reproach, like the Son. For these reasons, his relationship with God and his choice to obey or disobey is most like the relationships readers have with God.

Additionally, Satan brings readers a poignant awareness of their moral decisions through his language and his assessment of free will. His language and questioning complicates the idea of who Satan is and who we are. As we consider Satan's plight and his decisions, we are struck by their familiarity, and the parabolic lesson he teaches becomes personal. This study suggests that Milton purposefully created a Satan who is thought-provoking and encourages readers to participate in the poem. Like a figure in a parable, Satan brings abstract questions into focus—he requires readers to consider why we obey—and he offers readers one perspective through which to interpret the text and to interpret the idea of free will.

Satan has an antagonistic relationship with God, whereas Adam and Eve have a reciprocal relationship with God. Satan freely chooses disobedience, and God enacts justice, whereas Adam and Eve freely choose obedience, and God offers grace. I will explore these relationships in Chapter Four, where I will look at the lesson of free will from the perspectives of Adam and Eve, who are much like the younger son in the parable of the Prodigal Son. Like the younger son, who misuses and depletes his

inheritance, Adam and Eve take the free will that God gives them and they use it in a way that God disapproves of; however, like the younger son, they both also seek forgiveness, which they receive in abundance, despite their transgressions. This situation underscores the reciprocity in the relationship between the younger son and the father. In the parable of the Prodigal Son, “the [younger] son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found” (Luke 15:21-24). The younger son requests forgiveness, and the father reciprocates with blessings. Recognizing the reciprocity in the relationship is central to understanding free will, which is also based on reciprocal behavior. This lesson of forgiveness reinforces the lesson of free will. By considering the effect of God’s grace on Adam and Eve, readers better appreciate the reciprocity that free will requires.

The notion of reciprocity is not only related to the idea of free will, but also is inherent to the relationship between Adam and Eve. By observing Adam and Eve, readers see how free will and forgiveness are based on reciprocity; they also learn how marriage is based on reciprocity as well. By examining how reciprocity works between God and the human pair, as well as between Adam and Eve themselves, readers gain a new perspective on the way free will functions in the parabolic poem. Milton makes the idea of free will central to Adam and Eve’s understandings of themselves and their relationship with each other and with God.

Conclusion: “Justify[ing] the wayes of God to men”

In his study *Early Christian Rhetoric: The Language of the Gospel*, Wilder begins his chapter on parables by quoting Gerhard Ebeling: “The art of the parable . . . is none other than that of bringing the hearer face to face with what it is to be human and thereby to make clear what it means for God to draw near” (79). Through *Paradise Lost*, Milton brings readers face-to-face with their humanity and their need for free will. Furthermore, by bringing readers face to face with God and humanity, the poem is able to accomplish its stated purpose to “justify the wayes of God to man.” I am suggesting that Milton’s professed objective is to explain free will and to demonstrate how it is central to readers’ knowledge of God and knowledge of themselves, and the way Milton accomplished this feat was through writing a parable.

These chapters offer new ways of understanding Milton’s poem as a parable. They inform readers’ interpretations of the garden, Satan, Adam, and Eve in the poem. At the same time, they work together to support a reading of *Paradise Lost* as a parabolic narrative of free will. Parables ask people to engage with the lesson, not to find only one answer; *Paradise Lost* does the same. Reading *Paradise Lost* as an extended parable helps us to understand how the poem works to impart meaning. Discussions of *Paradise Lost* have long suggested the poem’s ability to prompt readers’ question. A. Bartlett Giamatti, for example, notes:

Milton prepares us for the Fall by making us suspect, by making us ask again and again: Will this garden too prove false? Will the inhabitants meet the same fate as past couples? Finally, Does this garden only *appear*

harmonious and beautiful and innocent? Does some potential evil lurk? And the answer is always, ‘Yes.’ It is a perfect and unspoiled garden; Yes, what we suspect will be confirmed. Milton always has his contraries in balance; both perspectives, the obviously good; (sic) the potentially bad, are always kept before us. (312)

Similarly, Sims suggests that “Milton’s epic voice provides the reader with many more alternatives that allow for the free play of opinion than with alternatives that force a choice between truth and falsehood [. . . .] The reader has a choice” (“Afterword” 198). In *Paradise Lost*, Joseph Wittreich notes, “The reader’s task is to distinguish the true from the false, the more from the less adequate interpretations and then, in accordance with the hidden logic of the poem, to privilege this interpretation over that one, while never forgetting the partiality and incompleteness of all interpretations” (xvii). Like these scholars, I want to explore the ways in which *Paradise Lost* prompts readers’ questions and urges participation in choosing between good and evil. This study is unique, however, in that it focuses on how the poem works as a parable to engage readers in right reason and to teach readers about free will. My dissertation demonstrates how *Paradise Lost* is a narrative poem that depicts divine and human relationships in order to demonstrate to readers the logic in the radical idea that doing God’s will enables freedom. Reading *Paradise Lost* as a parable helps readers to understand the logic of free will and to see how this poem and this lesson of free will are applicable to their lives. Considering *Paradise Lost* as a parable helps readers to recognize their position in the world and to gain knowledge of themselves and God.

CHAPTER TWO: The Parable in the Garden:

Eden as a Lens for Interpreting Milton's Parable

Although we do not see the garden until Book 4, Eden, I will argue, is the most important setting of *Paradise Lost*. Milton makes the significance of this setting clear from the opening lines of the poem, which identify the events in the garden—and the consequence of losing access to the garden—as the central topics of Milton’s “great Argument” (1.24). Because Eden is the place where “Mans First Disobedience” occurs and the location where the consequences of eating “the Fruit / Of that Forbidden Tree” are made evident, we cannot understand the poem or the lessons of the poem without considering the role of the garden (1.1-2). Eden is not merely the background for the poem’s plot; rather, Eden is the essential location for the poem’s lesson. The scenery and the details of the garden are central to the actions and reactions of the characters. The garden teaches Adam, Eve, and readers to perceive how eating the forbidden fruit simultaneously caused “all our woe” and enabled our greatest human ability: the use of free will (1.3). Roland Frye comments on this purpose of the setting in *Paradise Lost*, noting that Milton’s description of landscape is significant for creating the poem’s meaning. Quoting Jeffrey Spencer, Frye reminds us that the landscape in Milton’s epics “‘symbolically represent[s] or objectif[ies] the poems’ thematic content; the poet’s argument is obliquely set forth in the iconography of his landscapes’” (*Milton’s Imagery* 218).²⁸ Similarly, Victoria Silver explains, “Eden carries the burden of the poem’s

²⁸ Frye also refers to “[Jackson] Cope’s observation that in *Paradise Lost* ‘scene continually acts as mimesis of argument’” (*Milton’s Imagery* 218). He continues, “For Milton, imagery was rarely if ever merely decorative, but was developed to express or suggest or support an idea” (Frye, *Milton’s Imagery* 348).

argument, with all the narrative strands converging on the crucially human event of the Fall” (286). I interpret Eden in a similar way and see the garden as a lens through which we can interpret Milton’s parable of free will. Not only does Eden encompass the poem’s argument, but also the garden teaches us how to read the argument.

As we outlined in the introductory chapter, free will enables individuals to choose their behaviors. Milton presumed God does not create humanity to conform to His will, but enables humans freely to choose their actions and behaviors in order to freely align with His will. He asserts in *On Christian Doctrine* that humanity’s fall from God’s grace was not predestined, but resulted from free will: God “HAD MERCY ON THE HUMAN RACE, ALTHOUGH IT WAS GOING TO FALL OF ITS OWN ACCORD” (YP 6:173). He further argues, “God’s supreme wisdom foreknew the first man’s falling away, but did not decree it” (YP 6:174). In *A Milton Encyclopedia*, Virginia Mollenkott contends that “God is ‘perfectly free,’ both in His decrees and His actions [. . .] He freely decreed the reasonableness, and therefore the free will, of men and angels” (Mollenkott. 114-115). Mollenkott uses Milton’s doctrinal position in *On Christian Doctrine* as a context for interpreting ideas of freedom in *Paradise Lost*: “‘It follows, therefore, that the liberty of man must be considered entirely free of necessity, nor can any admission be made in favor of that modification of the principle which is founded on the doctrine of God’s immutability and prescience’ [. . . Rather,] man becomes more and more free as he

willingly cooperates with the divine will” (115).²⁹ Milton develops his ideas on free will through the plot of the poem, but also through the setting: the Garden of Eden.

Eden is a place God declared “good” (Gen. 1:10). It is a place filled with fruit-bearing trees, rivers, and animals. It is the place where all good things grow. Joseph Duncan explains the etymology of the word Eden: “The Hebrew word for Eden, which perhaps originally meant a flatland, was associated with the Hebrew verb ‘to delight.’ The garden ‘in Eden’ was interpreted as a garden ‘of delight’ and was translated by the Greek word for paradise” (14). This setting of goodness and delight is essential to Milton’s argument about free will. For Milton, Eden is a place where readers can take pleasure in the landscape, but it also is a place where they can gain knowledge and experience. Specifically, Eden is important because it enables readers to gain insight by experiencing the garden as Adam and Eve experience the garden. Both readers and characters are filled with wonder as they explore and learn about the “delicious Paradise” and their role within this garden setting (4.132). Like Adam and Eve, readers learn of God’s expectations, promised blessings, prohibitions, and gift of free will. The garden is the setting in which Adam and Eve become aware of themselves and God through dreams and through discussions with each other, angels, and fallen angels. The Garden of Eden is important in Milton’s poem because it is the place where realization of self first occurs and this recognition of self is necessary for understanding free will and how it works. In

²⁹ David B. Carroll further encapsulates Milton’s ideas of liberty as having the following definitions: “(a) without physical freedom man enjoys no higher, inner liberty, (b) that higher liberty is possible only for the virtuous, since a slave to vice holds himself in bondage, (c) liberty serves only truth, never custom or error, no matter what authority seeks to constrain it, (d) conscience and reason guide the virtuous man in exercising free choice, (e) liberty and human dignity are God-given, hence natural to man, (f) freedom is essential to the progress of reformation, and (g) liberty is an expression of Christian charity” (Carroll 19).

Paradise Lost, as in other early modern conceptions of the Biblical garden, it was through Eden that “man discovered [. . .] a reality which defined his own being” (Comito 39). The focus of this chapter is not that the beauty of the landscape elicits self-knowledge, but that the *experience* within the landscape teaches readers how to read and ultimately leads to knowledge of free will.

For this reason, my analysis of Milton’s garden differs from ecological studies that emphasize the nature of the place of the garden. John Knott’s reading of *Paradise Lost* suggests that the loss of the garden is related to loss of identity and loss of relationship with natural world (81). He contends that Milton “attached so much value to the capacity for wildness of nature in this place [the Garden of Eden], with its ‘wanton growth’” because the garden represents “a yearning for a pristine, vital natural world where we can make a place for ourselves and find harmony and delight” (Knott 82). Similarly, Ken Hiltner examines gardens in a seventeenth-century context, and he suggests that the garden is a way for us to contemplate our current condition and ourselves in light of our past in Eden. He argues that for Milton, “this foolish uprooting of ourselves from our place on Earth was the pivotal human act—and the source of our current sorrow” (Hiltner 5). While I agree that Eden does have a nostalgic affect on readers, I also want to explore how the garden helps readers contemplate their future. I want to focus on the garden’s proleptic aspects as well, which are evident when we explore how the garden is part of Milton’s parable. Just as Jesus’ parables use familiar images or situations to point to the Kingdom of Heaven, *Paradise Lost* uses the familiar place of the garden and the familiar situation of the Fall to point to the future as well.

Rather than focusing on how the garden is a place of lost perfection or nostalgically seeking to restore the garden, Milton is seeking to point to something bigger and beyond the garden.

Diane Kelsey McColley begins to address this idea as she identifies the images and ethics embodied by the garden in *Paradise Lost*. She suggests that images of paradise, Milton's included, "constitute a celebration of creation" and a "re-creation of the possibilities of Edenic consciousness and conduct, not without labor and pain but with hope for earth as well as heaven" (McColley, *Gust* xii). She asserts that "we cannot go back to Eden, but Milton and like-minded artists can help form in the mind a patch of innocence in which to labor to restore such a complex consciousness, both for the sake of present justice and, in their view, to go forward toward the time when a purged and renewed earth [. . .] 'Shall all be Paradise'" (McColley, *Gust* xvi). McColley's study emphasizes the importance of the place of the garden, even if it is a future paradise, whereas I am more interested in discussing the garden as a vehicle for gaining knowledge rather than as a locale.

My understanding of the garden in *Paradise Lost* is more aligned with Karen Edwards' interpretation of Milton's Eden. Edwards looks at *Paradise Lost* in the context of seventeenth-century natural history and suggests that the place of the garden is important as it helps us to see beyond the garden. She demonstrates how seeing the poem in light of early modern science and natural history helps readers to see how Milton is using both older and modern ideas in his poem. She contends that Milton's mingling of old and new ideas in his description of the natural world in *Paradise Lost* teaches readers

ways of reading and ways of knowing the world. Building on this idea, I suggest that *Paradise Lost* also offers readers ways of knowing themselves and their relationship to the world and its inhabitants. Milton's poem has this effect as we read it as a parable. This chapter demonstrates how the garden is a context through which to read Milton's parable of free will. It also explains how we learn to read Milton's lesson by learning how to read his poem.

Part I: Milton's Garden vs. Other Gardens

In *The Earthly Paradise and the Renaissance Epic*, A. Bartlett Giamatti argues that Milton's Eden is an amalgam of other literary gardens: "Milton's ostensible task was to make the earthly paradise in Book IV perfect and delightful, and out of allusions to and reminiscences of almost every Biblical, classical, modern, and 'real' garden he could find, he composed his own complete, integrated vision" (300). Giamatti concludes that "In this garden, all the conflicts found in the other gardens are held in balance by the Christian-Humanist poet in his 'golden Scales'; and even after disobedience had outweighed innocence, the garden remains as a master image of equilibrium, and a version of the blissful Truth that man has always wanted and by which all other gardens are found wanting" (351). Barbara Kiefer Lewalski also comments on Milton's description of Eden. She suggests that Milton's mention of classical gardens, which she notes are "fictional and wholly inadequate versions of the beauties and bliss of Eden," serves to help readers more fully appreciate Eden (Lewalski, "Milton's Paradises" 16). Giamatti and Lewalski illustrate that other literary gardens have depicted idyllic landscapes, but these gardens are not perfect enough to accurately depict the reality of

Eden. Milton builds on the descriptions and elements of other gardens in order to present a landscape that is both idealistic and realistic in order to bring readers to a new, more profound understanding of Eden. As Roland Frye explains, Milton's garden is important as a place, but it is more important as a conduit for learning. He contends that "Milton wishes us to see its [Eden's] landscape not as an end in itself, but so that we may enter into its mood, its consciousness, and understand its significance" (Frye, *Milton's Imagery* 218). As we enter into Milton's Eden, we notice the elements of the landscape, and we discover that these details are important texts that we must learn to read in order to comprehend the significance of the garden and the poem.

To best understand how Milton's garden works as a setting that informs characters and readers about free will, we must consider how poetic gardens generally work and how Milton's garden is similar to and different from other types of gardens. In addition to understanding Milton's garden as a reflection of, response to, and revision of other literary gardens, Milton's garden also must be understood in the context of contemporary landscape gardens. Landscape gardening became fashionable in the sixteenth century, and the first gardens in England appeared during the reign of Henry VIII (Beretta 66). These historic early modern gardens were "an external expression of an interior world" (Mosser and Teyssot 11). That is, gardens were compositions of intricate aesthetic patterns, such as ornate hedges and arranged flora, and utilitarian landscapes designed to elicit thought and imagination. Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century gardens were noticeably dissimilar from their surrounding vegetative landscapes. In contrast to the haphazard growth of plants in forests or meadows, early modern gardens were locales

of pattern and ornamentation filled with arrangements of “fountains, statues, pergolas, arbours, grottoes, groves, [. . .] and flowers” (Dixon 42).³⁰ These orderly expositions of trees, flowers, and water features were imposed on natural, organic conditions. These gardens were landscapes shaped according to fixed patterns. An ideal early modern garden, Lionello Puppi explains, would have had the following characteristics:

It should be enclosed and orderly, with a pergola, hedges, an orchard and a fountain. In the ideal garden, ‘. . . a single arcade runs from the house to the garden, two steps leading up to it from the courtyard; on either side are simple rooms intended for everyday use. The garden has an abundance of fruit trees—apples, pears, pomegranates, damsons—and fertile vines; near the house is a grove of plane trees, with clipped box hedges close by, a beautiful laurel and a spring whose waters, more transparent than glass, are sacred to the muses.’ (47)

Unlike these sculpted gardens, Milton presents a view of paradise that is not ornate, but seemingly void of the order and ornamentation that was popular in early modern gardens. Curiously, Milton’s garden lacks an obvious pattern or structure. Roy Flannagan notes that molded gardens did not appeal to Milton’s sensibilities: “the word ‘Art’ generally has a negative connotation for Milton,” so instead of creating a garden of artistry, “Milton contrasts contrived and regulated human gardens with profuse natural gardens such as that of Paradise which God has planted” (448, n. 68). While sculptured gardens defined

³⁰ Frye, however, suggests that “Milton’s Garden of Eden lacks the formal regularity of most seventeenth-century gardens, whether in Italy or in England, for which Milton substituted a natural expansiveness and variety.” (Frye, *Milton’s Imagery* 6)

contemporary fashion, Milton's garden is notably not sculptured and is free from prescribed design. Instead of exalting formal, artistic garden landscape, Milton depicts a garden which is "not nice Art / In Beds and curious Knots, but Nature boon / Powrd forth profuse on Hill and Dale and Plaine" (4.241-243). In contrast to the neatly sculpted hedges of contemporary gardens, Milton's Eden is "a steep wilderness [. . .] With thicket overgrown, grotesque and wilde" (4.135-136). His paradise opposes the unnatural, molded flora in Renaissance gardens and rejects their forced, artsy nature.³¹ Helen Gardner also discusses this aspect of Milton's Eden, noting that it is not "the old formal garden of Elizabethan and Jacobean times with beds cut out in formal lozenges and squares, trimmed with box-edgings, and with terraces adorned with topiary work. Nor is it one of those wonderful Italian gardens that Milton must have seen on his tour of Italy, an architectural garden. This garden is not something opposed to nature. It is nature idealized and in perfection" (78-79).³² Milton's non-stylized garden is striking because it does not contain the familiar "textual," that is, sculptural or architectural, elements observers expect to see in gardens; Milton's wild requires readers to "read" the garden in new ways.

³¹ Ironically, as noted in *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature*, "Milton's version of the Edenic landscape had a lasting impact on the popular imagination. The wealthy began to trim their estate gardens in 'miltonic' style because of its pleasing sublimity" (225). In *The Genius of the Place*, John Dixon Hunt also notes that "*Paradise Lost* [. . .] became almost a sacred text for later gardenists [. . .] From Milton was derived authority for serpentine lines, natural treatment of water, rural mounds, wooded theatres, and for the rejection of 'nice Art / In Beds and curious knots' in favour of 'Nature boon / Poured forth profuse on Hill and Dale and Plaine.'" (79).

³² Gardner continues, "It is the new conception of a garden as nature in miniature, where trees, bowers, and fountains, lakes and waterfalls make up a landscape, a conception that comes to perfection in eighteenth-century garden parks and that spread all over Europe as *le jardin anglais*. Milton is of his age in thus picturing the Garden of Eden as a landscape garden, sharing with Marvell's mower a hatred of what 'luxurious man' has made of innocent nature in his gardens" (78-79).

While the “textual” elements of Milton’s Eden are strikingly unlike the ornamental landscapes of his time, the function of the “textual” elements in his garden is similar to that of other gardens. Like other early modern gardens, Milton’s Eden is imbued with characteristics that tell a story, are visually pleasing, provide recreation and theater, and offer sanctuary from life outside the garden.³³ As Monique Mosser and Georges Teyssot explain, these characteristics were common: “As a place for aesthetic experimentation, [the garden] offered a setting for references to ancient myth and Arcadian legend through the picturesque and the sublime,” and through these allusions and images, “Nature was thus created anew and the story of the world rewritten” (15). Ilva Beretta links these details to the educational aspect of gardens:

Almost every feature of the garden represented man’s quest to gain knowledge and understanding of nature: grottoes with displays of minerals and shells, often coupled with the hydraulic engineering of fountains and automata; the gathering of different exotic animals in aviaries, ponds and parks as a result of voyages to new continents; botanical gardens and orchards where new and exotic plants were cultivated and where experiments in hybridization and grafting resulted in new and strange specimens and species. (39)

³³ As Lucia Tongiorgi Tomasi reminds us, “The garden of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries [. . .] fulfilled so many different functions: not only was it a place for pleasure and entertainment and for solitary meditation, a setting for sculpture, automata and *giochi d’acqua*, it was also a laboratory for botanical and medical research” (81).

Through these details, she notes, the garden provided visitors a place to acquire knowledge.³⁴ Beretta quotes Ralph Austen's 1657 treatise on orchards and fruit trees to support this assessment:

‘The *World* is a great *Library*, and *Fruit-trees* are some of the *Bookes* wherein we may read & see plainly the Attributes of *God his Power, Wisdome, Goodnesse &c.* and be be [sic] instructed and taught our duty towards him in many things even from *Fruit-trees* for as trees (in a *Metaphoricall* sence) are *Bookes*, so likewise in the same sence they have a *Voyce*, and speake plainely to us, and teach us many good lessons.’

(117)

John Steadman also refers to a contemporary author, quoting Thomas Browne to demonstrate early modern views of nature: “Nature is a ‘universall and publick Manuscript’” (*Nature* 11). Nature is a text to be read.

As a manuscript or text, gardens were understood as allegories. Terry Comito notes that “Trees and fountains [. . .] were subject to a variety of allegorical interpretations,” including the tree of life and the fountain of life, which represented the “eternity of the cross” and the purity of water used in baptism (49). John Prest, likewise,

³⁴ Beretta further explains, “The Renaissance garden was intended to be a total experience through which the visitor had to use all his senses when exploring its features. In the process of understanding a possible iconographical programme behind the garden, he had to rely not only on the five physical senses of smell, sight, hearing, taste, and touch, but also certain intellectual faculties such as his memory, his ability to structuralize and his capacity for philosophical reasoning. And as if this was not enough, he also needed the fourth dimension in order to fully appreciate the garden; time was essential in attempting to grasp the whole picture of the garden. The time involved was not only the time used for exploring the garden, but also several different perspectives of time such as the seasonal cycles, the astrological cycles, the cycle of Hesiod's five, or Ovid's four, ages, the return to Eden, all depending on which of the themes was chosen for the iconographical [sic] unit or the overall structure” (40).

highlights the allegorical aspects of the enclosed, Edenic garden:

The enclosed garden thus became ‘a secret place, enclosing within it the mysteries of the Old and New Testaments’ and everything in this garden was then, in its turn, enveloped in allegory. Each individual flower illustrates some aspect of the Christian faith, reminding the observer either of some simple virtue, or of some more sophisticated theological truth [. . . .] The whole garden served as a kind of surrogate Bible. It was rich in allegory, and the allegory extended beyond the flowers to the [garden’s other] features. (23)

Allegorical significance extended beyond the plants into other features of the garden. Familial gardens depicted order via symbols of lineage and power, which included “heraldic symbols and beasts” as well as “Coats-of-arms and heraldic festoons” (Pizzoni 72). These aspects of the garden were testaments to authority and power: “Wealthy potentates and aristocrats of the period, from kings and princes to church dignitaries and rich patricians, employed every device available in order to emphasize—symbolically and allegorically—their own importance and power” (Puppi 50). While Milton’s poem does demonstrate his ability as a poet, the details of his garden do not primarily or allegorically draw attention to him. Rather, the garden and its elements emphasize the roles and actions of the gardeners, Adam and Eve. In contrast to elemental symbols of power and lineage that are extraneous to the plants in the garden, Adam and Eve are organic to the garden. Adam is described as having “Hyacinthin Locks” (4.301), like a hyacinth flower, and Eve is described even more explicitly as a flower when Satan first

approaches her in the garden. She is “Veild in a Cloud of Fragrance” among the roses, “Her self, though fairest unsupported Flour” (9.424, 432). Furthermore, Satan’s description of Adam and Eve “Imparadis’t in one anothers arms” reminds readers of their concert with the garden (4.506). Because these descriptions of Adam and Eve are not allegorical, they help readers understand that interpreting Milton’s Eden requires paying attention to non-allegorical detail.

Milton’s garden is not an allegory, but it is a text to be read and readers should interpret the imagery in Milton’s poetic garden in order to decipher the parable of *Paradise Lost*. Milton would have recognized that garden imagery was intended to be read and that “reading” was innate to the garden experience. Like his contemporaries, Milton created a garden that was a text for interpretation as well as an element central to his written text. Edwards concludes that Milton demonstrates through *Paradise Lost* that the natural world is a place to be studied and interpreted.³⁵ Milton’s garden reflects contemporary scientific models and ideas of natural history, Edwards explains, asserting that “As Milton represents it in *Paradise Lost*, the newly created world is indeed a book to be read for pleasure and instruction” (Edwards 2). Quoting Haskin, Edwards notes that *Paradise Lost* “‘represents the world-as-book as having been already difficult to read before the Fall,’ a fact symbolized, he points out, in the tangled undergrowth and perplexing paths of paradise” (65). By depicting the garden as a book, Edwards suggests that Milton’s mingling of old and new ideas in his description of the natural world in *Paradise Lost* teaches readers ways of reading and ways of understanding the world. She

³⁵ Edwards also explains how to read nature, although her study focuses on scientific theory, rather than garden theory.

further explains that “As Milton represents it in *Paradise Lost*, God’s ‘other book’ offers, as the poet believed the Bible did, a source of never-ending pleasure for the reader who meditates on it day and night” (Edwards 6). She defines this reading process as “experimental” reading and relates this kind of reading not only to scientific practice emerging in the seventeenth century, but also to Protestant practices of reading the Bible. James Grantham Turner identifies early modern Protestant reading practices, arguing that “Scripture was conceived in terms not purely intellectual, but *dynamic* (reading becomes a movement or ‘journey’), *dialectic* (the text also moves towards, enters into, and transforms the reader, sometimes by a process of resistance and struggle), and *vitalistic*: the Word is apprehended as a living being, a movement and a presence, and the response is correspondingly ‘alive’—as much emotional and energetic as ratiocinative” (4). Reading was a participatory experience. For Turner, “The first three chapters of Genesis thus become a place not only for the struggle between innocence and experience, or between conflicting ‘Priestly’ and ‘Jahwistic’ texts, but also for the conflict of reason, imagination, passion, and faith” (30). *Paradise Lost*, as a poem about the first chapters of Genesis and as a poem about a garden, also embodies these characteristics and invites readers to actively participate in reading and interpreting the text.

This kind of reading is modeled by the characters in the poem, Edwards explains, noting that the conversations between the characters also promote this practice of experimental reading. She interprets Raphael’s instructions to Adam as being deliberately ambiguous to promote reading and interpretation for both Adam and readers: “Raphael’s reading of heaven is at one with his reading of creeping things: it is open-ended and

richly indeterminate. It is indeed structurally unresolvable, designed not to meet Adam's demand for a 'solution' to 'resolve' his doubtful reading (and the etymological cousins make his demand doubly insistent)" (Edwards 66).³⁶ Furthermore, Edwards suggests that "The new experimental reading, which Milton makes central to Adam and Eve's life in paradise, demands a creative and ongoing engagement with text. Thus Raphael does not interpret the minims' script for Adam and Eve; they must interpret it for themselves—and continue to review and perhaps revise their interpretation. Construing meaning is a labor that is coterminous with life" (68-69). Following the characters' examples, readers also should interpret the text of the garden and the poem for themselves. *Paradise Lost* is open to this kind of reading process. As Edwards suggests, "The mode in which the poem inscribes the natural world encourages the reader's engagement in continual 'musing, searching, revolving new notions.' It is a mode which values re-creative acts of construing new meaning by 'conferring places'; it discourages declarations of absolute interpretive certainty; and it leads the reader to value the fragments out of which the whole is composed" (202-203). In Edwards' view, the landscape in *Paradise Lost* inspires readers to learn. In my view, the garden in *Paradise Lost* helps readers to understand Milton's parable.

³⁶ Edwards further explains, "Milton's representation of the book of the world embraces the entailments of the metaphor in a distinctive way: *Paradise Lost* suggests that the value of God's other book lies not in its provision of conclusive answers but in its openness to constant rereading and reviewing. Pronouncing the 'right' answer to the cosmological controversy would make Raphael's reading of the book of heaven prescriptive, and the poem makes it clear that while the creatures have meaning, they do not have a meaning" (66).

Part II: Interpreting Milton's Parable

William G. Riggs remarks that “The extent to which the action of Eden can serve Milton as a relevant moral parable for postlapsarian men has been questioned directly or implicitly by those who insist too emphatically on a sharp, generic distinction between fallen and unfallen worlds” (47). Riggs does not develop the idea that Milton’s poem is parabolic, but his offhanded comment and his subsequent analysis of the actions in the poem confirm my extended analysis of Milton’s poem as a parable. Gardens, like parables, bring about changes in viewers and readers. The arrangement of a garden is similar to the arrangement of the text of a parable; the garden draws observers into the landscape, while the parable draws readers into the text. Milton uses these aspects of language and garden imagery to draw readers into his text and to influence the way they read his poem. In this way, both gardens and parables are effective. As we discussed in the previous chapter, parables require engaged readers to interpret the text. Biblical parables, as Amos Wilder demonstrates, “lea[d] men to make a judgment and to come to a decision [. . . .] The parables make men give attention, come alive and face things” (71-88). Similarly, John Donahue explains, “the parable functions as an event of revelation when the hearers freely enter its world, and appropriate its challenge” (197). As Wilder and Donahue suggest, parables promote awareness and require action; likewise, so does Milton’s garden.

Milton’s garden plays a crucial role in his parable for two major reasons: one, the garden teaches readers how to read, which is important for interpreting the lesson of the parable; two, the garden is a setting for the characters’ actions, which are the subject of

the parable. Adam and Eve use their free will in the garden, while Satan understands free will by observing the garden. As such, Milton's definition of free will is set in the context of his garden. Recognizing this context allows readers to interpret Milton's parable.

Understanding Eden requires readers to view the garden as a distinct space in the poem. Eden is like Heaven, but noticeably different from Hell and Chaos. This depiction reflects historic representations of Eden. Historically, Eden was understood as "God's 'secret region,' *hortus Dei* set off by a wall of trees, a 'happy retreat,' a 'place apart,' 'the chosen place,'" a place that is sacred because it is distinct and set apart (Comito 35). Milton builds on these traditions and creates an Eden that is an "enclosure green" and is surrounded by a "verdurous wall" (4.133, 143). The wall is visually a demarcation of space that separates the garden from the surrounding cosmos. This separation also echoes Biblical representations of separate spaces that denote God's special relationship with his people. Throughout the Old Testament, the Israelites have a relationship with God through sacred, set aside spaces and through images of fecundity. God's covenant with his people brings blessings of abundance: generations of descendants to Abraham (Genesis 22), fertile flocks and extraordinary perseverance for Jacob (Genesis 30, 32), bountiful crops during famine for Joseph (Genesis 41-45), and plenty of manna in the desert for the Israelites (Exodus 16). Similarly, the Israelites had an identity and a relationship with God through spaces that were set aside: Mount Sinai, the Ark of the Covenant, and, notably, the Promised Land. The Promised Land, set aside for God's chosen people, is not only a "land that floweth with milk and honey" (Deut. 6:3), but also a place of protection, like a walled garden: "And the LORD gave unto Israel all the land

which he swore to give unto their fathers; and they possessed it, and dwelt therein. And the LORD gave them rest round about, according to all that he swore unto their fathers: and there stood not a man of all their enemies before them; the LORD delivered all their enemies into their hand” (Josh. 21:43-44). In addition to the imagery of abundance, fecundity, vegetation, and protection in the Pentateuch, this idea of God protecting his chosen people appears in garden imagery in prophetic books as well. The Book of Isaiah uses garden imagery to depict God’s protection of his people: “For the LORD shall comfort Zion: he will comfort all her waste places; and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody” (Isa. 51:3). The garden motif in Isaiah suggests that set aside spaces represent humanity’s relationship with God; gardens are a way for humans to access and understand the divine. As Milton demonstrates, they are also a way to know and experience free will.

At the same time, Biblical gardens are also reminders of what humanity does not have; the gardens represent ideals of the future. For example, Ezekiel explains to the Israelites:

This land that was desolate is become like the garden of Eden; and the waste and desolate and ruined cities are become fenced, and are inhabited. Then the heathen that are left round about you shall know that I the LORD build the ruined places, and plant that that was desolate: I the LORD have spoken it, and I will do it. (Ezek. 36:35-36)

Out of the depleted landscape God says he will create a refreshing, protective paradise and will confirm his covenant with the Israelites. As Milton knows first-hand, however, these promises are not (yet) realized. The prophets depicted a home, a place of rest, and a place of peace and safety. However, as Milton suggests, this ideal garden landscape is not a place where humanity can exist. The Garden of Eden, like the Promised Land, does not exist. Adam, Eve, and readers have to live outside the walls of the garden. The purpose of the parable is to teach readers how to live outside the garden. Emphasizing the wall around the garden underscores the point that the garden is inaccessible to humanity. The wall also demonstrates that readers must see the garden from a variety of perspectives in order to understand the garden's purpose and function in the poem. The characters' experiences demonstrate that the garden is a place where the characters learn about having a relationship with God via free will (like Biblical gardens established a relationship between God and his people) and that the physical place of the garden is not important in itself as much as it is important for the lesson it imparts.

Just as the wall around the garden offers readers a new understanding of Eden and free will, the wall affects Satan's perspective and knowledge of himself and his relationship with God. The wall causes Satan to acknowledge his choice to be outside the garden. Upon seeing Eden, Satan voices understanding of the effects of his choice to rebel in Heaven and the damnation that resulted from his actions. He recognizes the goodness and beauty of Eden, and he also realizes that he cannot have those joys. He decries, "my self am Hell" (4.75) as he acknowledges his distinction and exclusion from the garden and its inhabitants. The boundaries of the garden and his viewpoint from

outside the garden provide Satan with an understanding of himself and the position he has chosen within the universe. Seeing Satan's response to the wall and the garden helps readers to appreciate the enormity of his decisions and invites readers to consider the outcomes of their own decisions.

Milton also comments on free will by demonstrating the fallibility of the wall as a barrier of protection. The wall seems to serve as a physical form of protection, but this protection turns out to be a façade. Satan (and other angels) easily enter the garden. Satan's trespassing is closely related to the lesson of free will that the wall helps to impart. Satan, as C. Herbert Gilliland, Jr. notes, "acts as a transgressor of boundaries and a destroyer of limits" as he rejects the limits imposed by God (43). He "refus[es] to recognize the authority of God" and he "cause[s] Adam and Eve to break the one limiting command of God" regarding the forbidden fruit (Gilliland 44). Both Satan and the wall illustrate that free will is not constrictive and limiting. Just as the wall allows for Satan's transgression and enables both good and evil to exist in the garden, free will allows for human transgression and enables grace.³⁷

Milton clearly believed that texts encouraged thoughtful study and independent thinking and he certainly accepted the idea that reading was heuristic. In *Areopagitica*, Milton asserts that "books are not temptations, nor vanities; but usefull drugs and materialls wherewith to temper and compose effective and strong med'cins" (1008). He reasons that reading is an important education that allows readers to "exercise [their]

³⁷ Gilliland continues, "it is thus our duty to recognize and willingly choose to accept our limits, to acknowledge our 'just circumference'" (47).

owne leading capacity” and to distinguish between good and evil (Milton, *Areopagitica* 1005, 1006). Carol Barton sees this philosophy within *Paradise Lost* as well. She asserts:

Milton is striving throughout the epic to teach us to avoid [rhetorical trickery,] (demonstrating by object lesson how easily it is to fall victim to ‘words cloth’d in reason’s garb’), and to illuminate the tacit warnings he so subtly imbeds within the body of the epic itself, alerting those readers who are members of his ‘fit audience though few’ to the fact that all is not as or what it seems, nor is it what it should be, no matter how often or how gloriously it may seduce us at first glance. (Barton par.1)

When read as a parable, *Paradise Lost* offers insight into Milton’s idea of free will. Milton wrote straight-forward definitions and explanations of free will in *On Christian Doctrine*; however, this text does not engage readers and help them to comprehend the nature of the concept of free will in the same way *Paradise Lost* does. In *On Christian Doctrine*, Milton writes, “if, because of God’s decree, man could not help but fall [. . .] then God’s restoration of fallen man was a matter of justice and not grace” (YP 6:174).³⁸ He concludes that God’s restoration and salvation of humanity is, in fact, based on his grace, not on a principle of justice. He declares that God “calls and invites to

³⁸ I accept Miltonic authorship of *On Christian Doctrine*. *Milton and the Manuscript of De Doctrina Christiana* is a good resource for further exploring this topic (Campbell, Gordon, et. al. *Milton and the Manuscript of De Doctrina Christiana*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). C. A. Patrides discusses aspects of grace that appear in *Paradise Lost*, including the angels, the description of creation, and the Fall of Adam and Eve and God’s response to it. He explains that these details attest to God’s “pouring forth” of grace. “The absolute primacy of grace is established absolutely, yet once that is done Milton ensures the proper balance through strategically placed words. Grace may constrain but does not necessarily command. It is ‘offerd,’ it ‘invites,’ it can even be ‘neglected.’ If neglected, it deprives man of mercy; but it ‘endeavor’d’ with sincere intent, it enables ‘persisting’ man safely to reach the end. Milton’s balanced view is the balanced view of St. Paul, of St. Augustine, of the Christian tradition: ‘work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God which worketh in you about to will and to do’” (Patrides 213-214).

grace” those to whom he offers salvation (YP 6:177). Furthermore, he asserts that through Jesus, fallen humanity “is raised to a far more excellent state of grace and glory than that from which he fell” (YP 6:414). He proclaims, “CHRIST [. . .] REDEEMED ALL BELIEVERS AT THE PRICE OF HIS OWN BLOOD, WHICH HE PAID VOLUNTARILY, IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE ETERNAL PLAN AND GRACE OF GOD THE FATHER” (YP 6:415-416). For Milton, grace is an indispensable complement to free will. Michael Lieb explains that Milton saw “both conscience and right reason as the product of grace” (66).³⁹ Similarly, Ron Featheringill suggests “Milton did not think that the idea of human free will was incompatible with God’s infinite grace. He [Milton] points out that God’s grace is behind all things, and it is, in fact, the source of man’s free will” (190). In *On Christian Doctrine*, Milton uses numerous Bible verses to support his beliefs regarding grace and free will. Although the verses provide evidence for Milton’s conclusions, the abundance of information does not communicate the nature of God’s grace and its relationship to free will in the way Milton’s language in *Paradise Lost* does. In *Paradise Lost*, readers are forced to come face-to-face with the idea of free will and its implications regarding human nature and God’s nature.⁴⁰ The poem transforms readers’ knowledge of free will from an understanding of a theological notion to an experience of personal grace.

³⁹ As Lieb further explains, “In the second book of *De Doctrina*, Milton makes it clear that conscience is an ‘intellectual judgment of one’s own deeds, and an approval of them, which is directed by the light either of nature or of grace’ (YP 6:652). Conscience, then, is an innate faculty bestowed upon humankind as a sign of the ability not simply to reason but to make right choices” (Lieb 66).

⁴⁰ In this way, *Paradise Lost* is not unlike other epics. As Featheringill explains, “All of the Renaissance epics, Catholic and Protestant alike, contend that God’s grace is essential if human affairs are to be successful, but they all celebrate man’s free will to choose between good and evil, and thus man is ultimately responsible for his own earthly successes and ultimate salvation or damnation. And as we see in *Paradise Lost*, God is not threatened by the power man has through choosing, but he takes delight when human beings choose to love and obey him freely” (178).

As U. Milo Kaufmann notes, “Eden is [accessible] to the machinations of evil. While God makes the sundry gestures of posting guard, and of preparing Adam and Eve for Satan’s appearance, no guard or sentry proves adequate” (42).⁴¹ The emphasis on the failure of the external, physical protection emphasizes the importance of instead valuing internal, spiritual protection, that is, right reason. The garden walls do not actually protect Adam and Eve. Because the physical wall of the garden fails Adam and Eve, readers learn that they must rely on right reason to inform their free will and they must use their free will to make right decisions.

Adam and Eve ultimately learn the lesson of free will because Satan ignores the wall and enters the garden, but they are instructed on this subject first through the act of gardening. Frye explains, “This work of ‘tending’ the Garden had been allegorized from the time of Philo through that of Raleigh, More, and Milton: according to this moral interpretation of the Garden, ‘Reason was to control the Passions, protect the Virtues, and generally keep the Soul in good order’” (*Milton’s Imagery* 239). He refers to Lewalski’s argument that “‘for Adam and Eve the external paradise can be secure only so long as they cultivate and enhance the paradise within’” (*Milton’s Imagery* 239). Similarly, Peter

⁴¹ Roland Frye also discusses the garden wall. As we see, the wall is not protective, but it does meet readers’ expectations as part of a garden tradition or feature: “The wall surrounding Eden was a visual feature upon which most medieval artists insisted, and various types of walls are encountered in art over a period of several hundred years. Constructed of stone or brick, though sometimes of plaited wickerwork, their designs usually expressed the architectural and building skills of the period in which they were painted [. . .] Milton’s continuation of this largely outdated structure [of the wall] may be due to the popularity of the *hortus conclusus* tradition in poetry from the Song of Songs down to his own day, and it may also represent another instance of his consistent attempt to introduce into his epic descriptions the most salient features of the pictorial renderings of the same subject. At all events, the wall is there as a striking feature of Milton’s Garden landscape, though he perfectly adapts it to his own conception by making it no longer a masonry wall but rather a ‘verduous wall,’ composed of thickets of tall trees (IV, 142-149). By this expedient, he was able to preserve the *hortus conclusus*, and yet to maintain consistency with the more realistic visions of Eden inculcated by the arts of the preceding two centuries” (Frye, *Milton’s Imagery* 236).

Lindenbaum argues that “Milton’s Edenic life encompasses a good deal of moral activity, educative growth, even error and something bordering upon good old-fashioned hard work, in what are still specifically unfallen conditions” (142). He further explains that “A number of Hebraic fathers interpreted Gen. 2:15’s reference to dressing and keeping the garden as ‘being occupied in the words of the Torah and keeping all its commandments.’ Within the specifically Christian tradition St. Ambrose, following up on Philo’s allegorizing bent, referred to Adam’s tilling as the exercise of man’s virtue” (Lindenbaum 143-144).

Similarly, Adam and Eve garden in order to find what Knott calls the “rhythm and meaning to their daily lives” and to enjoy a harmonious relationship with nature (76). I accept Knott’s premise, but propose the notion that the act and rhythm of gardening provides a higher purpose than simply being in tune with nature: it also brings the gardeners awareness of themselves and of God. The act of gardening brings Adam and Eve an awareness of themselves and their relationship with God because choosing how to keep the abundant vegetation becomes a metaphor for using free will. Milton does not ornamentally prune, shape, or sculpt his garden, but allows nature’s mysterious planting methods to populate the space so that Adam and Eve can prune it as they see fit. The garden is wild so that they can tend it into order. His garden demonstrates Adam and Eve’s ability to shape nature as they prune and care for the garden, but also symbolically illustrates Adam and Eve’s ability to mold their own natures and themselves by using reason and free will.

This point is underscored by the contrast between Adam and Eve tending and ordering gardening and God tending and ordering the universe. Raphael addresses this issue by telling Adam about the arrangement of the spheres. Raphael notes, “thir motions harmonie Divine / So smooths her charming tones, that Gods own ear / Listens delighted” (6.625-627). This description reminds us that God created the heavens, and while he also created the garden, there is a distinction between these aspects of creation. God does not populate the heavens with beings to manage the cosmos, but he does populate the garden with Adam and Eve to manage the earth. While God orders the heavens, he leaves the ordering of the garden to Adam and Eve. As such, the ordering of the garden is not imposed by the architect of the garden, God, but is chosen by the inhabitants of the garden, Adam and Eve. This arrangement suggests that pruning and ordering the garden is a metaphor for free will. There is no doubt that the garden must be regulated or ordered—nature’s fecundity insists upon it—but this ordering is not prescribed. The underlying pattern of order is not a philosophy of gardening, but a theology of free will.

This lesson on ordering the garden and free will is reiterated by the abundant growth of the garden. Milton’s garden grows in opposition to human efforts. In fact, throughout the poem, Adam and Eve strive to cultivate the garden. Eve remarks to Adam:

well may we labour still to dress
 This Garden, still to tend Plant, Herb and Flour,
 Our pleasant task enjoyn’d, but till more hands
 Aid us, the work under our labour grows,
 Luxurious by restraint; what we by day

Lop overgrown, or prune, or prop, or bind,
 One night or two with wanton growth derides
 Tending to wilde. (9.205-212)

This wild landscape is significant not only because it represents the antithesis to the early modern garden, but also because it requires Adam and Eve to actively tend the plants. In this way, the growth of the garden instructs readers how to read and interpret the fecundity and gardening in *Paradise Lost*. Milton describes the growth as “wanton,” a word he uses in various ways several times throughout *Paradise Lost*, and these various definitions help readers to learn the importance of reading carefully. The *Oxford English Dictionary* offers a number of definitions of wanton, several of which are appropriate for describing the vegetation in Book 9. The entries 7a and b, for example, define wanton as “Profuse in growth, luxuriant, rank” and “Robust, overflowing with health,” while entry 8 describes it as “Unrestrained.”

Using the term wanton to describe the garden is also significant because Milton uses this term to describe the characters as well. Entry 3c defines wanton as “Sportive, unrestrained in merriment of moving objects, viewed as if endowed with life: Sportive, impelled by caprice or fancy, free, unrestrained.” In fact, this *OED* entry includes an example of Milton using the term in Book 9: “So varied hee, and of his tortuous Traine Curld many a wanton wreath in sight of Eve.” Although Milton uses wanton several other times throughout the poem, the *OED* only records the use of wanton as a description of Satan in Book 9. At the same time, the first definition listed in the *OED* seems appropriate for other uses of wanton in the poem. Entry 1a defines wanton as an adjective

selected to describe individuals who are “Undisciplined, ungoverned; not amenable to control, unmanageable, rebellious,” while 1c defines it as an adjective used to define actions that are “Lawless, violent; in weaker sense, rude, ill-mannered.” These characteristics seem reflective of Satan and the other fallen angels.

In Milton’s description of the fallen angels who answered Satan’s call, he mentions Chemos, god of the Moabites, as one of the fiends who attends Satan. Chemos is noted as a false god who “entic’d / *Israel* in *Sittim* on thir march from *Nile* / To do him wanton rites, which cost them woe” (1.412-414). Similarly, 40 lines later, wanton appears in a description of the fertility god Thammuz, who caused the Israelites to fulfill their “wanton passions in the sacred Porch” of the Lord’s temple (1.453-457). Likewise, in Book 11, Michael and Adam observe “A Beavie of fair Women, richly gay / In Gems and wanton dress” who tempt men into lascivious acts (11.582-583). Adam supposes these women are acting according to the goodness of nature, but Michael corrects Adam’s misreading, telling him these wanton women dwell in “Tents / Of wickedness” (11.607-608). Michael further explains that wanton people are “of true vertu void” (11.790). He suggests that a lifestyle of “pleasure, ease, and sloth, / Surfet, and lust [change their moral compass] till wantonness and pride / Raise out of friendship hostil deeds in Peace” (11.794-796). These uses seem best suited for entry 4d, which defines being wanton “as tempting to extravagance or luxury.”

In contrast, wanton has positive attributes when applied to Raphael’s flight to meet with the human pair. His journey leads him traveling through flowering fields in which Nature “Wantond as in her prime, and plaid at will / Her Virgin Fancies, pouring

forth more sweet, / Wilde above Rule or Art; enormous bliss” (5.295-297). Roy Flannagan notes that “Wantoning here seems to lead to fecundity, which also is innocent [. . .] Nature before the Fall is innocently but perpetually sexual and fecund [. . .] Nature is playing out her fantasies here: the implication is that man’s art will never come close to the sweetness of the art of nature or the bliss (‘enormous’ in the sense that it is beyond normal fallen experience) it brings about in the viewer” (484, n. 90). The definition of wanton also is more positive in Book 4, when Milton uses the word wanton to describe Eve. Our first view of Eve is through her “Disshaveled [. . .] wanton ringlets” (4.306). Unlike the use of wanton in the context of the fiends, this use of wanton is less insidious. The description of Eve’s hair is seductive, and has sexual implications, but this definition seems less threatening than other definitions. The narrator suggests her hair is organic, like the garden, and implies that her curls are a function of her “Subjection [. . .] coy submission, modest pride, / And sweet reluctant amorous delay” (4.308-311). While we might question the narrator’s assessment of Eve’s innocent, wanton tresses, we can see the distinction between her wantonness and the wanton behavior of the fiends. Wanton also has positive connotations in Adam’s description of their gardening as a task to tame the wild growth of the garden. He tells Eve the “Yon flourie Arbors, yonder Allies green [. . .] require / More hands then ours to lop thir wanton growth” (4.626-629). In this context, wanton describes the abundance of the garden and is associated with positive reproduction and creation of future generations. To further contrast the appropriate wantonness of Eve with inappropriate wanton characteristics, Milton compares Eve and Adam’s “wedded Love” with the “Casual fruition” of unmarried

couples. Sexuality in marriage, Milton argues, is superior to sexual acts resulting from “Court Amours / Mixt Dance, or wanton Mask, or Midnight Bal, / Or Serenate” (4.767-769). Entry 2a reminds readers that wanton also means “Lascivious, unchaste, lewd [or] in milder sense, given to amorous dalliance,” especially when referring to women. Readers recall the “wanton growth” of the garden as they read Satan’s creating serpentine, “wanton wreath[s]” to get Eve’s attention (9.517) and Adam and Eve lustfully gazing at each other, “wantonly,” with “lascivious Eyes” (9.1015, 1014). These uses of the word wanton require readers to differentiate between the meanings. These different definitions of wanton require readers to pay attention to the poem’s language and are another way the poem teaches readers how to read by discriminating between definitions. Milton deliberately employs this loaded word to demonstrate the importance of using reason to discern the right meaning and to choose the right kind of behavior.

Readers also learn how to read and understand free will by seeing the plot from the perspectives of both Adam and Eve. While the garden is the setting to determine God’s relationship with humanity, the humans’ experiences with God in the garden differ. Milton treats Adam and Eve, as well as the lessons readers should learn from them and their relationship to each other, God, and the environment, very differently: Adam talks to God in a dream (8.292-310), whereas Eve talks with Satan in a dream (5.37-91); Adam learns of the forbidden fruit from God (8.319-333), whereas Eve learns of this prohibition from Adam (4.420-435); Adam discusses the creation of a help meet with God (8.357-451), whereas Eve hears God’s voice and is “invisibly [. . .] led” away from her reflection in the water and led to Adam (4.476); Adam converses with Raphael in

Book 5, whereas Eve wanders off to tend her flowers, choosing instead to hear Raphael's lessons second-hand from Adam (8.39-54); Adam talks with Michael in Books 11 and 12, whereas Eve sleeps (because Michael has "drencht her eyes" [11.367]) and she later hears Michael's teachings through Adam; and Eve talks to Satan in Book 9, whereas Adam only hears of Satan through conversations with Raphael (Books 5-7) and Eve (Book 5). These various experiences are important because they offer what Lindenbaum calls the "double vision" of the poem. He explains, "these occasions [of double vision] in the poem are important because it is when they occur that we participate most fully in the poem's action and best comprehend the particular conditions of Adam and Eve's prelapsarian existence. And it is at such moments especially that we are prompted to view Adam and Eve's Edenic life as a reflection of our own experience since the fall" (Lindenbaum 156). Seeing the lesson of the poem from each perspective teaches readers how to read the poem, in addition to helping readers to more fully consider human choices and more fully learn Milton's lesson on free will, ideas we will continue to discuss in the next chapters.

CHAPTER THREE: The Role and Perspective of Satan in *Paradise Lost*

As I suggested in the introduction, Milton had an affinity for parables. Others have argued that Milton identified with parables and that he found parables useful tools for explaining and understanding his views, decisions, and actions. Building on this assumption, I suggest that Milton also saw value in using parables to help others reflect on their positions and choices.⁴² I suggest that Milton created a parabolic narrative in *Paradise Lost* to help readers comprehend not only the perspectives and decisions of the characters in the poem, but also their own perspectives and the decisions they make. I will use the parable of the Prodigal Son as a model for interpreting the poem and as a way to illustrate how *Paradise Lost* is an effective parabolic narrative. In this chapter, I will explore how Satan is like the older son in the Biblical parable and I will demonstrate how we can better understand Satan's perspective of free will and grace by considering his role in the poem.

My interpretation of Satan in the position of the older son in the parable of the Prodigal Son builds on the work of Thomas Merrill and Bryan Adams Hampton, who also interpret Satan as a parabolic figure. Merrill sees Satan as a parabolic character because he is in situations that are "religiously affecting to readers because of the evocative blend of realism and vivid strangeness that they unfailingly exhibit [. . . and because] they are rooted invariably in 'worldly' ethical dilemmas" (286-287). Satan's "fallen state is, above all, that of an 'outsider,'" which, Merrill explains, classifies Satan's

⁴² Haskin asserts that in *Paradise Lost*, Milton "makes no mention of Jesus' parables," even though the idea of the Parable of the Talents is evident (228). He also notes that "In the exegetical tradition, the banishment of Adam and Eve from the garden was sometimes compared to the casting out of the unprofitable servant at the end of Matthew's parable" (Haskin 228).

position as encompassing a “parable of alienation” (292, 289). This point is underscored by seeing Satan in the position of the older son. Merrill also contends that Satan is a character with whom we closely identify, explaining that “We desperately search for some exception for ourselves from this Satanic dilemma, an exception that the parable before us oddly refuses to provide” (289). Merrill’s reading of Satan is useful for mine. It is precisely these attributes that establish Satan as a parabolic character and this perspective that is important for interpreting *Paradise Lost* as a parable. Whereas Merrill discusses these characteristics to argue that Satan “functions as an instrument of divine insight by providing Christian readers with a parabolic awareness of God’s presence” and that he helps readers to become “aware [. . .] of the reality, the justice, and the mercy of God,” I suggest he provides parabolic awareness not just of the reality of God, but also of Satan’s (and our) relationship to God and his decree of free will (292, 285). Using Merrill as a starting point, Chapter 3 examines readers’ responses to Satan and their gained understanding of free will. Specifically, Satan creates this awareness through his position in the poem, which is like the position of the older son in the parable of the Prodigal Son.

Like Merrill, Hampton discusses Satan’s unique position and the relationship between this position and Satan’s misreading of God’s grace. He compares Satan’s experience of grace with the definition of grace that Paul offers in Romans 3, reminding readers of Paul’s claim that “the only ‘wage’ fallen humanity can earn from its ‘labors’ is spiritual death and desolation” and he calls this idea a “debtor’s theology” (99). Hampton continues, “The consequence of debtor’s theology is that every act of obedience or disobedience then pushes the debtor further into debt, one that cannot be repaid, thereby

nullifying the efficacies of grace [. . . . In *Paradise Lost*] Satan construes exactly this kind of debtor's theology, and it is this 'debt'—this nothingness—which occupies the center of Satan's contemplation" (Hampton 99). Satan's appropriating this debtor's theology prevents him from understanding God's actions and associates him with the position of older brother in the Prodigal Son parable. His perspective focuses on his own actions, not on God's. Both Satan and the older son made choices (to leave heaven and to stay at home with the father, respectively) and these choices are contrary to those made by their opposing narrative characters (Adam, Eve, and the younger son, who all make the choice to repent); consequently, Satan and the older son are confronted with the father figure's response to the other characters' actions, and both have difficulty accepting the response.

Viewing Satan in the position of the older son enables us to consider several characters in the role of the younger son. As I mentioned earlier, this dissertation contrasts the positions of Satan and Adam and Eve, and thus interprets the human pair in the role of the younger son. However, we also could consider Milton's parable by contrasting the roles of Satan and the Son in *Paradise Lost*. The relationship between these characters is important for understanding Satan's actions in the poem. Neil Forsyth discusses Satan's opposition to the Son, noting, "At issue here is the role that Milton gives to Satan as equivalent or narrative double of the Son. The whole sorry story begins, in Milton's version, from the rivalry that God wittingly installs between them by promoting the Son above Satan in the angelic hierarchy. They are mirrors for each other throughout the early and middle books of the poem" (Forsyth 13). Satan has a contrary perspective to that of the Son; seeing Satan and the Son in these diametric positions is a

reason to interpret these characters through the model of the Prodigal Son parable. The Son is theologically important in his own right and as the character to whom Satan is a foil—after all, as Forsyth notes, “clear that his [Satan’s] sacrifice leads not to the damnation but the salvation of mankind [. . . because] Satan is actually necessary for salvation” (13). Although Satan and the Son represent antipodal positions, I am instead contrasting the positions of Satan and Adam and Eve. Considering these characters enables readers to experience the similarities they share with the characters. Since the Son is entire divine in *Paradise Lost*, readers can better empathize and understand the more human characters actions and choices.

The parable of the Prodigal Son is a useful model for reading *Paradise Lost* because this parable uses the characters’ divergent perspectives to inform readers about God’s nature and his gift of free will. In this parable, we see the younger son’s homecoming from father’s point of view and the response of the father from the older and younger sons’ points of view. In *Paradise Lost*, we see the falls (of Satan and of Adam and Eve) from God’s point of view, and we see God’s actions and decrees from Satan and the fiends’ points of view, from the Son and the angels’ points of view, and from Adam and Eve’s points of view. Both the parable of the Prodigal Son and *Paradise Lost* require these opposing viewpoints in order to teach their respective lessons. The father is not being arbitrary or unfair in the Prodigal Son parable; God is not being unjust or tyrannical in *Paradise Lost*. In order to understand God’s nature in Milton’s poem, readers must explore the countering viewpoints as they consider which viewpoint they will choose to adopt. In this dissertation, I am considering the distinct viewpoints offered

by the main characters in the poem. These unique perspectives establish the characters as parabolic figures who help readers understand themselves in relation to the lesson of Milton's parable, which is a lesson on their relationship with God through free will.

In order to appreciate Satan's perspective, we have to understand Milton's idea of freedom. Anthony Low addresses Milton's ideas on freedom by defining Milton's idea of "willing obedience" and noting that "paradoxically, for Milton, if man is to realize his nature fully, he must be free; yet, if he is to realize his nature fully, he must also obey" (133-134). He continues:

The paradox is difficult [. . .] How can we be truly free if we must remain under obligation to obey someone more powerful than we are? Surely to be free means to do or think whatever we choose to do or think, rather than to order our actions and our thoughts in accordance with someone else's instructions. The simple answer, of course, is that God is all-good and all-loving, as well as all-powerful. What He wills is best for his creature and for their happiness. (Low 134)

What Low alludes to in this discussion is what he calls the "complex answer," the uneasiness that readers have in understanding and accepting this "simple" response to God's will. Throughout the poem, Satan embodies this uneasiness by questioning God's goodness. Satan highlights the paradox and problem embodied by the relationship between free will and obedience. He demonstrates how using free will to be obedient seems incongruous, just as killing the fatted calf seems unjust to the older son in Jesus' parable. Satan makes sure that readers do not automatically accept the notion of free will

as good simply because it is from God. Through his questioning, Satan helps readers also to consider and question the justice of free will.

Similarly, Satan reminds us that freedom requires choice. Benjamin Myers defines the role of free will in *Paradise Lost* in the following way:

The first created human beings, endowed with autonomous freedom, are placed by God in an environment that calls for the creative exercise of choice, so that the being of Adam and Eve consists in a state of becoming, in a continuing process of decision and development. Eve's and Adam's Edenic life is characterised by an abundance of alternative possibilities and by the contingent liberty of indifference that enables them freely to actualise such possibilities. This openness of choice and possibility is tragically lost through the fall, and is displaced by a self-focused narrowness and a self-chosen poverty of genuine possibilities. But the same freedom is, in *Paradise Lost*, restored by the grace of conversion. Through grace, the human self is turned back towards God and the abundance of choice that characterised prelapsarian existence is restored.

(165)

Myers' understanding of freedom is important for discerning the parable of Milton's poem. The "self-focused narrowness" is what constrains Satan's perspective and makes his position similar to that of the older son in the Lukan parable; the restorative grace that offsets this narrowness is what the father in the parable offers to the younger son, it is what enables the younger son to have an opposing reaction to that of the older son in the

Biblical parable, and it is what enables Adam and Eve to have an opposing viewpoint to Satan in *Paradise Lost*.

Satan's actions reveal his misunderstanding of free will. Instead of accepting that he could freely act in ways that align his will with God's will, he chooses to act in a way that purposefully opposes God's will and he tempts Eve. Rather than allowing the vision of Adam and Eve, who in "The image of thir glorious Maker shon, / Truth, wisdome, Sanctitude severe and pure" (4.292-293), to move him, he focuses on his external place in the universe and on what his "eyes with grief behold" since he is distinct from that image and that setting (4.358). He continues this unreasoned behavior upon entering the garden. Satan notices the wonderful similarity of Heaven and earth, yet instead of being inspired by the "sweet interchange / Of Hill, and Vallie, Rivers, Woods and Plaines" (9.115-116), Satan turns his attention to himself and laments:

I in none of these
Find place or refuge; and the more I see
Pleasures about me, so much more I feel
Torment within me. (9.119-122)

Satan chooses to embrace the narrowness of his perspective and to act based on this perspective, which helps readers to consider his perspective and his choices.

Satan's actions also demonstrate his misunderstanding of God's nature and grace. Jackson Campbell Boswell explains that "As described in *The Christian Doctrine* and as commonly accepted by orthodox-protestant theologians, grace is the unmerited love of God for unworthy man [. . .] Grace alone is the pathway to salvation, but there is no way

man can earn grace; it is the free gift of God, His means of drawing man to Himself” (86). This free gift of grace is closely related to another gift that God offers humanity: free will. Maurice Kelley summarizes Milton’s ideas on the covenant of grace and its relationship to free will:

God declared this covenant [of grace] when he asserted that he would put enmity between the seed of the woman and the serpent, and the covenant was exhibited in the law of Moses and in the Gospel [. . . .] The Mosaic law, being imperfect, was succeeded by the Gospel. The Gospel is the new dispensation of the covenant of grace, far more excellent and perfect than the law [. . . .] The Mosaic law was imperfect: it was imposed on an unwilling people; it promised only temporal life; it could not justify; and man could not fulfill it. It was given only to convince mankind of its depravity, and to lead to Christ. The new law is not imperfect: it has willing followers; it promises eternal life; it justifies; and mankind can fulfill it. When the Gospel was announced, the earlier law was consequently revoked. From the dispensation results Christian liberty, whereby we are loosed by enfranchisement, through Christ our deliverer, from the bondage of sin and consequently from the rule of law and of man, to the intent that being made sons rather than servants, and perfect men instead of children, we may serve God in love through the guidance of the Spirit of Truth. (172-173)

This comprehensive explanation of Milton's idea of grace is useful for seeing how Milton discusses grace in conjunction with free will throughout *Paradise Lost*. Grace is an important part of Milton's notion of freedom. Milton promotes the idea of prevenient grace, an "aid or assistance given by God enabling man to exercise his free will and to accept the gift of salvation," which, as Boswell explains, calls humanity to use free will because "Grace clears man's befuddled senses and puts him in the right frame of mind to listen to the voice that calls man to repentance and salvation" (83, 89).

We see this aspect of grace fulfilled in the poem when Adam and Eve repent after the Fall. The narrator explains that with their prayer, "Prevenient Grace descending had remov'd / The stonie from thir hearts, & made new flesh / Regenerate grow instead" (11.3-5). God's transformative grace enables Adam and Eve to repent and reaffirm their relationship with God. Satan, on the other hand, understands petitioning for grace as "an ignominy and shame beneath / This downfall" (1.115-116). He does not see how using free will to obey God leads to repentance and forgiveness, but instead sees that repenting and asking for forgiveness require submission. Like Mammon, who suggests that accepting God's grace leads to an obedience to God that is not freeing, but rather filled with "Strict Laws [. . . and] Forc't Halleluiah's" (2.241, 243), Satan doubts the effects of grace and sees humility and repentance as a means to become enslaved to God rather than freed from the bondage of sin. Furthermore, Satan doubts that God could grant him grace. He considers the possibility, "But say I could repent and could obtaine / By Act of Grace my former state," but then concludes he is "excluded" from this possibility and instead

determines to enter the garden, where he tempts Eve and thereby completely rejects God's grace (4.93-94, 105).

Satan cannot see the relationship between grace and acceptance that Paul speaks of in his letter to the Romans: "For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God" (Rom. 8:15-16). Satan sees obedience to God not as a freedom from sin, but as an alternative kind of imprisonment. Satan's stance is not inconceivable, based on the way Paul describes it: "Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness" (Rom. 6:16-18). Paul's recurrent use of the word "servant" is problematic. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines a servant as an individual who "is under obligation to work for the benefit of a superior, and to obey his (or her) commands" and further notes that in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the word servant was "often used to render the L. *servus* slave. In all the Bible translations from Wyclif to the Revised Version of 1880-4, the word very often represents the Heb. *ʿēbed* or the Gr. *δοῦλος*, which correspond to *slave* [. . . and suggests a person] in the most degrading bondage." Satan focuses on the idea that a slave is "One who is the property of, and entirely subject to, another person, whether by capture, purchase, or birth; a servant completely divested of freedom and personal rights." He cannot accept that

freedom is an alternative to slavery and that freedom derives from aligning his will with God's will.

Satan's misunderstanding of grace is underscored by the contrast between justice and grace and the surprising way in which grace is offered. Boswell notes that "One facet of the Old Testament meaning of grace was that it is the nod of approval from a lord (divine or royal) to his subjects. The subject had no right to petition his lord for favor, but if he did and the master saw fit to accord approval, grace was the act and the result" (87, n. 5). This definition of grace illustrates the idea of grace displayed in the Lukan parable. Similarly, C. A. Patrides explains that "To the writers of the Old Testament grace (*hen*) meant not so much favour and affection as the unmerited love of God toward mankind [. . .] The attitude of the New Testament is no different. In the letters of St. Paul, who uses the term *charis* [grace] more often than anyone else, emphasis falls on grace as 'the gift of God' (Eph. ii.8)" (198-199). This idea of grace is expressed in the actions of the father in the parable of the Prodigal Son, and these actions shock and displease the older son. The father shows undeserved and unexpected forgiveness to his wayward son. For these reasons, it is useful to read Satan in the way that we read the older son in the parable of the Prodigal Son.

Using the parable of the Prodigal Son as an interpretive model, we can see how Satan functions in *Paradise Lost* in a parabolic way. Satan's role in Milton's poem is similar to the role of the older son in the Prodigal Son parable. Both Satan and the older son prompt readers to consider the justice of the father figure's actions; both Satan and the older son help readers to consider their own relationship to the story; both Satan and

the older son make the lesson of the story personal and applicable by taking the lesson from an abstract, theological reference to a real-life experience. This chapter focuses on Satan, his role, and his perspective in *Paradise Lost* and it discusses what and how he instructs readers about free will.

Forsyth suggests that Satan's characteristics are effective for two reasons: he is familiar and he is rhetorically appealing. Specifically, "first he has an interior, a private self, recognizably close to ours, and it is here rather than in a literal Hell that he is so intelligently, self-consciously damned—he has that hollow depth that texts seem to share with people; and second, well, he is a good speaker, both in the public scenes of the early and middle books, and in the more intimate dialogue of Book 9" (Forsyth 7). Through these characteristics, Forsyth contends, "Satan seduces the reader" (7). I suggest Satan is not only seductive, but also instructive in that these characteristics also teach us about free will. Satan informs readers about free will in two ways: through his position like that of the overlooked son in the Lukan parable and also through his language. Through his position, Satan offers a perspective that is contrary to others' in the poem. This contrast creates a parabolic tension, and this tension alerts readers to the importance of considering his language. Through his language, Satan brings readers a poignant awareness of their moral decisions and the implication of their Christian liberty. Satan's role in *Paradise Lost* and his rhetoric help readers understand their own situations and their relationships to God and free will.

Satan's perspective helps us to comprehend Adam and Eve's actions; we cannot understand their actions apart from Satan's connection to them. Satan interacts with

Adam and Eve by tempting Eve to eat the fruit, but this temptation is more than offering Eve a piece of fruit that represents disobedience to God; it is offering humanity an alternative way of gaining knowledge through active thinking, rather than through passive learning. His temptation offers a means for readers to engage in analytical thinking, the type of thinking Milton espouses throughout his writings. Satan's rhetoric requires readers to consider his arguments. Like Adam and Eve, readers encounter Satan as a being who offers an alternative point of view from the perspective adopted by the unfallen angels. Satan allows readers to reflect on poem, his position in the poem, and the way he is distinct from Adam and Eve. Reflecting on Satan helps readers to gain knowledge of free will. We cannot understand the choice Adam and Eve make to eat the fruit apart from their interaction with Satan and his thought-provoking questions. Milton purposefully created a Satan who uses language that intentionally stimulates readers' interest and encourages readers to participate in the poem. He requires readers to consider the broad implications of his actions and language. Readers cannot read his story without asking themselves why they are obedient. Satan illustrates the importance of obedience as he shows readers the consequences of his disobedience. At the same time, readers cannot read his story without contemplating the nature of free will. By observing how Satan uses free will to be deliberately disobedient, readers ultimately better understand the value of using free will to align their wills with God's will. By observing Satan, readers see that free will allows for choice, even if the choice is limited to only two options: obedience or disobedience.

Part I: Satan's Characteristics

Through the lens of the older son, we can see why Satan is familiar to us. Seeing the story from his perspective reminds us that while Satan nominally represents depravity, he does not simply personify evil. Rather, like the older son in the Biblical parable, Satan is a character who embodies aspects of humanity and represents feelings that are familiar to readers. David Urban cites James H. Sims' *The Bible and Milton's Epics* to suggest that Satan is familiar because he is an amalgam of well-known characters. Sims argues that Milton's Satan is based on a number of negative Biblical figures, including "Esau (174-78), the Babylonian rulers Nebuchadnezzar (173-75) and Belshazzar (178-79), the murderous King Herod (174-75), and the traitor Judas Iscariot (180-81)" (*Parabolic Milton* 16). As Sims explains, "Milton provides glimpses of the various facets of Satan's character by having the language used either by or about Satan associate him with familiar villains of the Bible" (*Bible* 172). These associations help Milton's Satan become a realistic figure. He is more than a general personification of evil, which readers could easily objectify and dismiss; instead, he represents human emotions, like jealousy and cruelty, and represents a figure acting out of anger for being overlooked or fear of being powerless compared to another. Satan feels "ire, envie and despair" as well as "Deep malice" and a desire for "revenge" (4.115, 123). He acts according to jealousy and vengeance, emotions with which readers are familiar, not according to strict moral principle, which readers acknowledge, but do not always embody. He feels such despair that he laments, "onely in destroying I find ease / To my relentless thoughts" (9.129-130). He is "bent [. . .] On desparate reveng" and is "Self-

tempted, self-deprav'd" (3.84, 130). The proem to Book 4 identifies the qualities that make Satan a familiar character: "Satan [. . .] attempt[s] the bold enterprize which he undertook alone against God and Man, falls into many doubts with himself, and many passions, fear, envy, and despare; but at length confirms himself in evil" (Proem, Book 4). He is bold and adventurous, sympathetic and human-like, and finally vengeful and malevolent. He deliberately disobeys God's law and chooses not to be governed by God. He is the "Traitor Angel" (2.689), the leader of the fallen angels who "trespass, Authors to themselves" (3.122). Satan follows his "proud imaginations" (2.10) and determines not to show submission to God; rather, he resolves to "waste his [God's] whole Creation, or possess / All as [his] own" (2. 365-366) in an attempt to "surpass / Common revenge, and interrupt his [God's] joy" (2. 370-71). As we read in Book 5, Satan is a powerful figure who becomes changed by invidiousness. He transforms from an "Arch-Angel, great in Power, / In favour and præeminence" (5. 660-661) into a "false Arch-Angel" who is motivated by "envie," "Deep malice," and "disdain" for the Son (5.694, 662, 666). These emotions are important as they contrast the love offered by God and the inhabitants of heaven, Robert Fallon suggests, and the contrast between these positions asks readers "to choose love over hatred" (124). Certainly, this contrast highlights Satan's complexity and invites readers to participate in the poem; however, these attributes also incite readers' awareness of Satan's situation and empathy for his condition. These emotional responses make Satan familiar to readers, and this familiarity gives him the ability to draw readers into the story, which reflects the structure of parabolic literature. John Donahue, referencing C. H. Dodd, explains that parables are "drawn from common life" and this

familiarity “‘arrest[s] the hearer by its vividness or strangeness, and leaving the mind in sufficient doubt about its precise application to tease it into active thought’” (5). Satan works in a similar way, causing readers to understand his plight and consider his position.

Satan’s familiarity offers readers an avenue to engage with the story in a personal way; this relationship between reader and text reflects the structure of parabolic literature. As Biblical parables incorporate plots and characters that readers recognize, Milton includes a character whom readers understand and for whom they feel compassion. As we read Satan’s situation and decisions, we are impressed by their familiarity; Satan’s experiences are uncannily like our own, which transforms the abstract parabolic lesson of free will that he teaches into a personal knowledge of and experience with free will. His questioning and use of free will complicates our understanding of who Satan is and also who we are. Satan’s striking familiarity draws readers into the story, similar to the way in which parables draw readers into the text.

Readers also cannot dismiss Satan as pure evil because he evokes empathy. In Book 4, Satan offers readers a transparent view of himself. Through his soliloquy, readers become empathetic to his plight. They feel compassion for the being who confesses, “Me miserable! which way shall I flie / Infinite wrauth, and infinite despaire? / Which way I flie is Hell; my self am Hell” (4.73-75). The compassion this insight stirs complicates readers’ reactions to Satan. After acknowledging his plight, he immediately hardens his heart and declares, “all Good to me is lost; / Evil be thou my Good” (4.109-110). With this declaration, readers’ compassion is complicated rather than dismissed by the hardening of Satan’s heart. As John Carey explains, Satan’s soliloquy enables readers to

see him with compassion. It “seems to indicate that Satan’s natural tendency, when caught unawares, is to love. Beauty and delight are his natural element [. . .] The [temptation] incident shows that he is not a destructive automaton, but a creature who *chooses* to destroy the human race against the promptings of his better nature” (Carey 139, emphasis mine). Readers have empathy for his perceived position and for his decisions.

C. S. Lewis also comments on Satan’s empathy-inspiring nature. In his *Preface to Paradise Lost*, Lewis argues that Milton’s Satan is “a magnificent poetical achievement which engages the attention and excites the admiration of the reader” because he is at once “an object of admiration and sympathy, conscious or unconscious, on the part of the poet or his readers or both” (Lewis 94). Satan also is an appealing character because he provokes readers to consider Satan’s temptation:

When we remember that we also have our places in this plot, that we also, at any given moment, are moving either towards the Messianic or towards the Satanic position, then we are entering the world of religion. But when we do that, our epic holiday is over: we rightly shut up our Milton. In the religious life man faces God and God faces man. But in the epic it is feigned, for the moment, that we, as readers, can step aside and see the faces both of God and man in profile. We are not invited (as Alexander would have said) to *enjoy* the spiritual life, but to *contemplate* the whole pattern within which the spiritual life arises. (Lewis 132)

As Lewis suggests, Satan engages readers because he is a character who represents a position we might accept. He has a unique ability to evoke readers' empathy and, through their empathy, causes them to consider the arguments and choices he makes throughout the poem. By considering Satan, readers gain an understanding not only of the implications of Satan's decisions, but also an appreciation of the implications of their own decisions. For these reasons, Satan is a parabolic figure and is an integral part of Milton's parable.

There are, as John Steadman points out, several ways of reading Milton's Satan:

To one, the devil is consistently evil and consistently absurd. To another, the devil is progressively evil and essentially tragic. To others, the portrait is a mosaic of complementary or incompatible qualities [. . .] For some readers, the character of Satan is fixed from the start and remains essentially unaltered; the change lies in the shifting perspective that the poet offers the reader, the varying points of view from which we behold the ruined archangel. For others, the devil does change; and his alteration is consistently for the worse, a progressive degeneration. For still another group, he does not really degenerate; the poet degrades him. ("Idea of Satan" 290)

These depictions of Satan invite us to consider that Satan could be the hero of the poem, which is common practice, but they also invite us to consider how Satan functions as a parabolic figure. Seeing Satan's characteristics as parabolic is a new way to understand Satan's role in the poem. Milton scholars have long focused on Satan's role as a hero or

anti-hero. Beginning with Romantic interpretations, analyses of Satan have considered “the underlying duality of Satan’s character [. . .] its depravity as well as its sublimity” (Steadman, “Idea of Satan” 258). Steadman rightly notes that “The issues are far more complex than the simple antinomy—Satanist or anti-Satanist—would suggest” (“Idea of Satan” 254). He suggests that reading Satan in a simplistic way raises questions that do not help readers interpret the poem. Rather than seeing Satan in binary ways, Steadman encourages readers to see the multifaceted nature of this character. Merrill, likewise, takes this approach, specifically linking this perspective to a parabolic one:

As we view Satan within the frame established by ‘Arch-Enemy’ on the one side and ‘Apostate Angel’ on the other, we ought to be attending to the entire tableau as a parable, savoring the conflicts of values between fore- and background, the psychological tensions spawned by those conflicts, and the general impropriety of Satan himself within that context. In other words, we ought not to look merely at the Satanic hero but at the whole Satanic predicament with its complete range of Satanic attitudes that we, as fallen humans, of course share. (288)

Furthermore, through knowing Satan we know ourselves and we can more fully understand that lesson. Kenneth Gross defines Satan as a “dramatic center for our interest” and explains that “To understand Satan’s affective power in this context [. . .] depends on our being careful not to condescend, on our resisting the temptation to literalize or divinize any apparent superiority to Satan which we may feel in reading his speeches; it depends on our allowing that there are occasions when we ourselves (for

better or worse) may echo or be implicated in Satan's mode of self-description" (338-339). By seeing ourselves in Satan, we better grasp his position in the poem and better understand grace and free will.

Satan is not strictly heroic, nor is he strictly evil. This duality in Satan's character determines how we read Satan and *Paradise Lost*. It allows us to see Satan as either good or bad (or both good *and* bad), to interpret *Paradise Lost* as teaching a unified or a discordant message, and to understand Milton as an author with clear or conflicting ideas regarding morality, freedom, and justice.⁴³ I suggest this duality enables us also to see how Satan requires readers to become involved in the poem. Seeing Satan's multifaceted nature helps readers to more fully know Satan as well as to more fully know themselves. These apparent inconsistencies not only help readers gain a more complete understanding of Satan, but also a more complete understanding of themselves. Satan is not a simplistic stock character, as might appear in an exemplum or an allegory. He is complex and requires active consideration. In this way, he is a parabolic figure who helps readers interpret the parabolic nature of *Paradise Lost*.

Part II: Satan's Role in Milton's Parable

Just as the older son in the parable of the Prodigal Son gives us insight into how to read Jesus' parable, which ultimately reveals the father's justice, Satan gives us insight

⁴³ Steadman reminds us that when reading *Paradise Lost*, we often "veer towards extremes of veneration or execration. We extol the devil beyond reason or vilify him beyond mercy; we applaud the fallen demigod or jeer at the stumbling clown" ("Idea of Satan" 253). While it is easy to read Satan as a highly polarized character, Steadman also points out that "The issues are far more complex than the simple antinomy—Satanist or anti-Satanist—would suggest" ("Idea of Satan" 254). He contends that reading Satan in a simplistic, antipodal way raises questions that do not help readers understand the poem; instead, these questions "call for categorical answers; but such replies are likely to be inaccurate and misleading, and any valid response must be hedged about with qualifications" (Steadman, "Idea of Satan" 256).

into how to read Milton's parable, which ultimately reveals God's justice. As we discussed in the first chapter, parables work by using surprisingly familiar language to draw readers into the story. In order to understand how Satan teaches through his familiarity, which draws readers into Milton's poem, we need to recognize the ultimate lesson of the poem.

One reason the parable of the Prodigal Son is effective is the way it presents the narrative contrast between the actions of the sons. In this parable, the older son is shown to be dutifully working in the field when the younger son returns. In contrast to the younger son, who "took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living," the elder son stays home and serves his father (Luke 15:13). As the older son reminds the father, "Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment" (Luke 15:29). This contrast between the sons' actions explains why appearance is an important part of parabolic narrative. In the parable of the Prodigal Son, the older son appears to be better than the younger son because the older son does not take his inheritance and waste it and because he stays home and serves his father.⁴⁴ However, as the message of the parable suggests, this appearance of goodness is not reliable. The older son appears to be better, but he is not rewarded. The younger son appears to be worse, but he is rewarded, despite his appearance. The Biblical parable reminds us that appearance can be misleading. In Milton's poem, Satan reinforces this lesson. Like parables, which have an "inherent doubleness" between surface text and

⁴⁴ This message is also apparent in the parable of the Good Samaritan. The Samaritan appears bad because he is not Jewish, but his actions show that he is better than Jewish leaders who do not stop to help the fallen traveler.

meaning, Satan has a doubleness, and readers must learn how to read his doubleness in order to understand the lesson he teaches (Naveh 7).

Satan's appearance in the poem helps readers to see how appearance is unreliable. Satan is a character who adopts façades of power. To appear authoritative, Satan feigns personas that make him seem larger than life. He is a "dread commander: [who] above the rest / In shape and gesture proudly eminent / Stood like a Tower" (1.589-591). He wields a "ponderous shield / Ethereal temper, massy, large and round" and a "Spear, to equal which the tallest Pine / Hewn on *Norwegian* hills, to be the Mast / Of some great Ammiral, were but a wand" (1.284-285, 296-298). Similarly, he seems heroic as he enters Chaos, especially as the narrator compares him to Jason and Ulysses (2.1017-1020), but in the end, Satan is a "weather-beaten Vessel" (2.1043). He uses this appearance of authority to manipulate the fiends in Hell. Although Satan seems like a powerful leader, in the end he is "false glitter" (10.452). His deeds do not render any "universal shout and high applause" that are due a hero; instead, he is met by "A dismal universal hiss" and is reshaped into "A monstrous Serpent" unable to use his tongue or limbs (10.505, 508, 534). Just as readers learn by interpreting the function of the garden wall and by defining the word wanton, they learn to question by considering these discrepancies between appearance and reality. Satan's façades are part of his parabolic function and they help readers learn how to read the poem.

We see this lesson affirmed at the end of Book 3 when Satan again alters his appearance. Upon approaching Uriel, Satan "change[s] his proper shape [. . .] And now a stripling Cherube he appears" (3.634-636). This disguise convinces Uriel that Satan is a

“Fair Angel”; Uriel does not recognize Satan as “the fraudulent Impostor foule” (3.694, 692). Because of his outward appearance, the “false dissembler [goes] unperceivd” (3.681). Uriel’s misreading of Satan’s appearance also reminds readers that interpretation should not be based upon appearance, a lesson Milton emphasizes with Satan’s encounter with Eve. When Satan meets Eve, he appears as a serpent. The narrative voice recalls Satan’s beauty. As the serpent, “pleasing was his shape, / And lovely” (9.503-504). The narrator also mentions the impressive, unserpentine way he moves, “erect / Amidst his circling Spires, that on the grass / Floted redundant” (9.501-503). Even though Satan-as-serpent is more beautiful than mythological snakes, his appearance is not impressive to Eve.⁴⁵ His physical stature is not potent, even though it is attractive. While his appearance is captivating, Eve notes only his voice. Her response is important because it helps readers to focus on Satan’s language, rather than on his appearance. Eve recognizes that outward appearance is not appropriate for interpretation; however, she fails to use the same scrutiny on Satan’s language. Paying attention to Satan’s language is important for understanding his character and his position in the parable of *Paradise Lost*. Norman Perrin reminds us that parables “command the attention of the listeners” and, quoting Amos Wilder, he notes that the language of parables ““lead[s] men to make a judgment

⁴⁵ The narrator compares Satan to mythological serpents:
 never since of Serpent kind
 Lovelier, not those that in *Illyria* chang’d
Hermione and *Cadmus*, or the God
 In *Epidaurus*; nor to which transformd
Ammonian Jove, or *Capitoline* was seen,
 Hee with *Olympias*, this with her who bore
Scipio the highth of *Rome* (9.504-510).

and to come to a decision” (129). By paying attention to Satan’s language, we can see our position and make an informed decision.

The parable of the Prodigal Son does not have a lot of dialogue, and the words of the older son are few. The only words we hear him speak consist of a complaint to his father: “Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf” (Luke 15:29-30). Despite the logic in his argument, his claim is not accepted. The father does not acknowledge his position, but instead explains, “Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found” (Luke 15:31-32). This exchange between the father and the older son reminds readers that while we must scrutinize appearance, we also must scrutinize language.

Milton’s parable expresses a similar lesson through Satan’s language. Milton makes Satan a rhetorically appealing character. Satan and the other fallen angels have the fiendish quality of speaking “glozing lyes” and using language “cloth’d in reasons garb.”⁴⁶ Satan’s language instructs readers and helps them pay attention to the meaning of his words. His arguments are sophisticated, tempting, and seemingly logical; his protestations seem credible. Satan is alluring because of his rhetorical questioning.

⁴⁶ *Paradise Lost* 3.93; 2.226. Although this phrase describes Belial’s speech, it also is applicable to Satan’s language.

Satan's language teaches us to read carefully and interpret correctly. His language is logical, but not right.

Readers see the persuasiveness and appeal of Satan's language by listening to his debates with his cohorts in Hell. Through the fiends' discussions in Books 1 and 2, readers gain a perspective of God that contradicts the idea of God espoused by Christianity. From the opening of the poem, Benjamin Myers explains, readers "encounter a God whose character is at once called into question, and whose goodness therefore cannot simply be taken for granted" (54). Myers' point is that "Satan's portrayal of God [. . .] constitutes a highly important aspect of the theology of *Paradise Lost*," and that the "Satanic theology provides a heretical foil against which the epic then proceeds, from Book 3 onwards, to offer its own positive theological account of the goodness of God" (54, 57). Indeed, readers learn about God's goodness by considering the position of Satan in the poem; by seeing Satan in the role of the older son, readers learn God is good and just. This view of God is recognizable through the contrast between Satan and God. It is through Satan's point of view that we more fully understand the power of God's grace and the affect it has on us if we choose to accept it.

Satan offers readers a point of view that challenges the idea of God as a loving, just deity. Instead of revealing God's goodness, Satan claims God is tyrannical and prevents freedom, calling God's authority a "Yoke" (5.786). He suggests that God opposes the fiends' positions as "Natives and Sons of Heav'n" who are "ordain'd to govern, not to serve" (5.790, 802). Additionally, Satan challenges God through his association with the language of the fiends. As the fiends argue about their next course of

action, they accuse God of being tyrannical and torturous. Moloch questions God's justice by asserting God is tyrannical and by denying the freedom inherent within obedience to God. Moloch appeals to his cohorts:

let us rather choose
 Arm'd with Hell flames and fury all at once
 O're Heav'ns high Towrs to force resistless way,
 Turning our Tortures into horrid Arms
 Against the Torturer; when to meet the noise
 Of his Almighty Engin he shall hear
 Infernal Thunder, and for Lightning see
 Black fire and horror shot with equal rage
 Among his Angels. (2.60-68)

Moloch's impassioned speech argues openly for choosing war as a way to leave the "dark opprobrious Den of shame" that is Hell (2.58), even if it means annihilation. He contends that war (and, consequently, God's wrath) "Will either quite consume us, and reduce / To nothing this essential, happier farr / Then miserable to have eternal being," or will enable the fiends to gain "if not Victory [. . .] Revenge" (2.96-98, 105). This phrase "happier farr," of course, ironically echoes the final lines of the poem when Adam and Eve leave the garden to find a happier existence within themselves as they live in the world outside the garden. Moloch's rhetoric that links annihilation to greater happiness raises doubts in readers' minds. Myers suggests that Moloch expresses "a theology in which creaturely freedom is utterly negated by the tyrannical rule of the divine will" (65). Readers

consider Moloch's idea, but then learn later in the poem that freedom and obedience are not mutually exclusive.

The other fiends also question God's justice and help readers to understand their relationships to God. Like Moloch, Belial acknowledges God's power, but whereas Moloch emphasizes God's despotism, Belial asserts God's omniscience. He suggests God's discernment and power would prevent the fallen angels from winning the war:

Warr therefore, open or conceal'd, alike
 My voice disswades; for what can force or guile
 With him, or who deceive his mind, whose eye
 Views all things at one view? (2.187-190)

The narrator contends that this argument attests more to Belial's "peaceful sloath" than to God's goodness (2.226). This suggestion invites readers to consider both Belial's responsibility for his actions and God's nature. Mammon also helps readers discern God's nature. He proclaims that returning to Heaven would result in submission and forced praise of God, and he presents this fate as unappealing: "how wearisom / Eternity so spent in worship paid / To whom we hate" (2.247-249). He argues that they should:

seek
 Our own good from our selves, and from our own
 Live to our selves, though in this vast recess,
 Free, and to none accountable, preferring
 Hard liberty before the easie yoke
 Of servile Pomp. (2.252-257)

Mammon's affirmation of hard liberty underscores Milton's lesson about free will, a point that Satan himself makes in Book 4 when he argues that serving God was not hard: "What could be less then to afford him praise, / The easiest recompence, and pay him thanks, / How due!" (4.46-48). Christian obedience is not hard, as Mammon suggests, but is easy. In Matthew, Jesus tells his disciples, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (11: 29-30). Mammon's suggestion contrasts this Biblical teaching, and thereby helps readers to see that there is a difference between obedience and servility.

Milton's poetic and rhetorical strategy of making readers encounter questions of free will and God's justice in Books 1 and 2 prepares readers to accept the answers the Son and God offer in Book 3. Moloch, Mammon, and Belial provide a perspective of God that offers an explanation of God's actions. Like the sons in the parable of the Prodigal Son offer an opportunity to observe the father's actions, the fiends in *Paradise Lost* offer an opportunity for readers to see and understand God's actions. The action of the father in the parable of the Prodigal Son is singular—he offers forgiveness and acceptance to the prodigal son—but the sons react to this action in different ways. Likewise, in *Paradise Lost*, God's action is singular—he offers forgiveness and grace to Adam and Eve—but Satan and the human pair react to this response differently. Their two contrasting viewpoints illustrate how God's action can be interpreted in more than one way.

Seeing God from the perspectives of the fiends enables readers to comprehend the opposing viewpoint of the angels. Raphael reminds readers that God's actions are just because they allow for free will. He tells Adam, "God made thee perfect, not immutable" (5.524) and he explicitly links this characteristic to God's creation of human will, which is "By nature free, not over-rul'd by Fate / Inextricable, or strict necessity" (5.527-528). Furthermore, he counters the assertions of the fiends by telling Adam, "Our voluntarie service he requires, / Not our necessitated, such with him / Finds no acceptance" (5.529-531). These statements counter the arguments of Satan and the fiends and help readers to consider the validity of the fiends' assertions.

Another way readers clearly see the heavenly angels' perspective is through Abdiel's argument. Abdiel provides readers with an interpretation of God's actions that opposes the perspective of the fiends. In God's proclamation for the Son's adoration, Satan sees servitude, whereas Abdiel sees freedom. Readers need these opposing perspectives to judge the decree for themselves and to understand the decisions the characters make in response to this declaration. While Abdiel's assertions contrast Satan's, Abdiel does not represent the position of the younger son. The younger son needs repentance, forgiveness, and grace; Abdiel is not fallen and does not need these things. Instead, Abdiel counters Satan's argument, and his counter assertions help readers to question Satan's point of view. If we did not have Abdiel (or the other unfallen angels') perspective, we would be tempted to empathize with Satan and not understand God's actions. Abdiel helps us to see the justice in God's actions, which enables us to have empathy for Adam and Eve's position as well. If we did not have the perspective of

the older son in the Lukan parable, we would not see the depth of the father's love for and forgiveness of the younger son. The father's action is valuable in itself, but seeing his action from the older son's point of view demonstrates the surprising depth of his response.

Abdiel demonstrates the depth of God's response by describing how God's actions enable freedom. He explains that it is not obedience, but disobedience, that is restricting: "That Golden Scepter which thou didst reject / Is now an Iron Rod to bruise and breake / Thy disobedience" (5.886-888). In contrast to the response of the fiends, Abdiel reminds us that Satan's arguments are "blasphemous, false and proud!" (5.809) Gross insists that this encounter "turns our attention to problems and paradoxes which the poem as a whole continues to trouble over" (331). Their discussion asserts the debate between freedom and obedience and helps readers to consider how these states of being are not opposed, but are similar. Furthermore, as Joan Bennett explains, this encounter prepares readers to interpret the encounter between Satan and Eve. Bennett argues, "If, at her temptation, Eve had weighed the serpent's words as rightly as Abdiel and Uriel do the angel's words, she would have remained blameless. Eve's right response would have been Abdiel's; reasoning thoroughly with the serpent and finding him ultimately intransigent, she should have separated and waited for another providence, for God to do something to the serpent" (91). After seeing Satan encounter these characters, readers learn the value of questioning Satan's rhetoric as well.

Seeing Satan and Abdiel interact informs readers' perspectives of Eve's response to Satan's temptation. Like Eve, we are tempted by his explanation that "God therefore

cannot hurt ye, and be just; / Not just, not God” (9.700-701) and enticed by his rhetorical questions:

wherein lies

Th’ offence, that Man should thus attain to know?

What can your knowledge hurt him, or this Tree

Impart against his will if all be his?” (9.725-728)

To Eve and to the reader, Satan’s words seemed “perswasive [. . .] impregn’d / With Reason [. . .] and with Truth” (9.737-738). Accepting Eve’s perspective enables readers to again see *Paradise Lost* through the model of the Prodigal Son parable. Although Eve listens to Satan, accepts his argument, and falls to his temptation, she ultimately revises her decision by petitioning for forgiveness. She (and Adam) take on the role of the younger son in the Biblical parable and receive God’s grace. Through reading the narrative of these events, readers learn the value of free will. They see how their position is parallel to Satan’s, and they discover that they can freely choose to sin or to obey.

Conclusion

For Milton, Biblical allusion “create[s] an atmosphere of alternatives, of freedom of choice, both for the actors in *Paradise Lost* and for the reader” (Sims, *Bible* 118). One allusion Milton makes is to parables. Milton’s poem functions as a parable as it provides an experience of the abstract idea of free will. *Paradise Lost*, like other parables, “point[s] beyond what is expressed to what is beyond expression” (Donahue 12-13). To explain free will in an understandable way, Milton offers readers Satan’s perspective and then contrasts this perspective with the viewpoints of others in the poem. Satan prompts

readers to consider his relationship to God. As he struggles to find justice and fails to find salvation, Satan becomes a parabolic figure. Readers learn through observing Satan's actions and considering Satan's arguments, which are based on his relationship with and knowledge of God.⁴⁷

It is helpful to use the parable of the Prodigal Son as a model for understanding Satan's relationship with God in *Paradise Lost*. In Book 3, God tells the Son that Satan "had of mee / All he could have; I made him just and right, / Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall" (3.97-99). Similarly, in the parable of the Prodigal Son, the father tells the older son, "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found" (Luke 15:31-32). Both explanations iterate the choice of the older son figure and help readers to consider the character's position after making his choice. Both older son figures have difficulty understanding the idea that grace is freely given; it is not something they can earn or something to which they are entitled. This notion that grace is freely offered challenges their belief that they should have earned different, better treatment than the younger son figures. As the parables in Luke and *Paradise Lost* show, this belief is wrong. Funk notes that "The word that turns the righteousness (not hypocrisy!) of the Pharisee out, that cancels the loyalty of the elder son, that overlooks the perseverance of the early laborers in the vineyard, has something drastically wrong with it," suggesting that the theoretical knowledge represented by the Pharisee, the elder son, and the early laborers demonstrates the apparent injustice in the

⁴⁷ Merrill suggests that Satan "functions as an instrument of divine insight by providing Christian readers with a parabolic awareness of God's presence" (292).

parables' solutions (*Language* 17). What the parables demonstrate through their seemingly unjust lessons, Funk argues, is that theoretical knowledge is not the point of parables. The purpose of parables is to illustrate and validate experiential knowledge and the way this type of knowledge establishes a connection to God via grace. He further explains:

There is nothing wrong with such [theoretical] logic except that it fails to discern that it is man and not God who is on trial. It refuses to let God be God. *The Pharisees are those who insist on interpreting the word of grace rather than letting themselves be interpreted by it.* The elder son is he who insists that his loyalty counts for something: his loyalty must be the basis of interpretation, i.e., the condition of any view of grace acceptable to him. For that reason the grace in the parable strikes him as rejection. And so it is with the righteous [. . .] who resist being exposed as sinners and are therefore constrained to hear the word of grace as blasphemy. (*Language* 17)

Milton's poem works in a similar way, revealing to readers the apparent injustice of God's actions and showing the logic of Satan's protestations. At the same time, the poem enables readers to be exposed to God's grace and to more fully comprehend the concept of free will, not as an abstract idea, but as a spiritual reality. Just as the parable of the Prodigal Son prompts readers to experience God's grace from the perspectives of both the elder son and the prodigal son, *Paradise Lost* enables readers to experience God's grace from the perspective of Satan and the perspectives of Adam and Eve. Their

divergent experiences demonstrate the nature of God's grace and free will. As U. Milo Kaufmann notes, Satan "is offended" by God's elevation of the Son (35). Similar to how the older son in the parable of the Prodigal Son does not understand the actions of his father, Satan in *Paradise Lost* does not understand the justice in God's action: Satan "does not see [. . .] how his own good is effectuated in the new regime," whereas, just as the prodigal son sees the benefit of the father's actions, other characters in the poem can easily see how the Son's elevated status is beneficial to them (Kaufmann 36). This tension between the characters' two distinct positions demonstrates the value in reading *Paradise Lost* as a parable. The Lukan parable's emphasis on the "limited generosity of the older brother" encourages readers to see the error in this perspective, which is contrary to the radical lesson Jesus teaches regarding the grace of God (Haskin 170). Haskin explains, "To think of God as one who makes demands is to reveal one's lack of understanding of a radically new 'dispensation,' in which God's unconditional love precedes all human efforts and renders them superfluous" (169-170). Satan does not understand or accept the idea that God offers grace; his notion of and experience with God's grace, as demonstrated through the contrast of his perspective from the perspective of Adam and Eve, helps readers to reaffirm their knowledge and experience of God's grace.

CHAPTER FOUR: The Role of Marriage in Milton's Parable in *Paradise Lost*

As Milton suggests throughout *Paradise Lost*, free will is not a means of fulfilling personal desires, but is a way of choosing to align personal desires with God's will. Milton models this lesson through the perspectives and actions of Adam and Eve. This chapter shows how Adam and Eve inform readers about free will in two ways: one, they illustrate free will by functioning as a pair who adopts the perspective opposed to Satan's; two, they demonstrate free will by acting as individuals in a relationship. Adam and Eve demonstrate the lesson of the parable of *Paradise Lost* by putting the lesson of free will into practice with each other as well as with God. That is, they seek forgiveness and offer grace to each other. This reciprocity is an important part of Adam and Eve's relationship with God and with each other. Through Adam and Eve, readers see how free will and forgiveness are based on reciprocity, and how marriage is based on reciprocity as well. By considering how reciprocity works between God and the human pair, as well as between Adam and Eve themselves, readers gain a new perspective on the way free will functions in the parabolic poem.

Readers also gain insight into how free will and reciprocity are important aspects of marriage. James Grantham Turner argues that "Adam imagines a relationship not of bland identity but of reciprocity, an equal degree of creative tension, 'fellowship,' and 'compliance'—which means not simply an 'object or source of pleasure' but a delight in the awareness of the other's pleasure" (283). Milton's rendering of Adam and Eve supports his idea that marriage requires concern for another person as well as concern for one's self. This type of reciprocity of concern echoes the ideals expressed in Milton's

idea of free will. Milton's depiction of Adam and Eve demonstrates the reciprocity between individuals and the responsibility both have to participate in their relationship. This reciprocity and responsibility reflects the relationship between obedience and free will.

In the first part of this chapter, we will discuss Adam and Eve as a pair. We will consider their common reciprocal relationship with God and the ways in which, as a pair, they are in a position similar to that of the younger son in the parable of the Prodigal Son. Like the younger son, Adam and Eve take what the father figure gives them (which, in *Paradise Lost*, is free will) and use it in a way that is contrary to the father's expectations. Also like the younger son in the Lukan parable, they seek the father figure's pardon and receive his forgiveness and grace. They learn, like the younger son, that focusing on self via "riotous living" leads to unhappiness (Luke 15:13). They learn to seek forgiveness and to use their free will in alignment with God's will.

In the second part of this chapter, we will see how Adam and Eve function as individuals who offer distinct perspectives on free will. They are separate individuals who represent opposing points of view from each other, as opposed to the larger parable where Adam and Eve function as a single unit that represents a common perspective that is opposite of Satan's. They individually show how indulging their free will selfishly leads to submission, whereas aligning their own wills with God's will leads to freedom. I propose that we see how Adam and Eve function in Milton's parabolic poem by focusing on their final decision: to ask for forgiveness. As individuals, their actions throughout the poem are different; in the end, however, they both make the same, "right" choice to seek

God's grace. Exploring how their different approaches yield the same end result provides a new perspective on their marriage. Their relationship as two individuals is another model we can use to read Milton's larger parabolic message.

Just as Jesus has to teach his disciples how to interpret his parables, Milton explains to his readers, through the relationship of Adam and Eve, how to understand his parable. In the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Jesus describes the purpose of his parables and tells his disciples: "Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables: That seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them" (Mark 4:11-12).⁴⁸ In addition to informing the disciples that they are to interpret the language of the parables, Jesus also provides a model of interpretation for them. Not only do we know that "when they were alone, [Jesus] expounded all things to his disciples," but also we now have two examples of his interpretation as he reveals the lessons of the parables of the Wheat and the Tares and the Good Samaritan (Mark 4:34). In Luke 8, Jesus explains:

Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away.

And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard,

⁴⁸ See also Matthew 13: 13-17 and Luke 8: 9-10.

go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection. But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.⁴⁹

Similarly, after telling the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus asks his disciples to interpret the parable: “Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves? And he [the lawyer talking with Jesus] said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise” (Luke 10:36-37). Jesus uses these explications as models to show his disciples how to understand parables. Furthermore, Jesus helps his disciples learn to read the lesson of his parables by providing multiple parables that teach the same lesson. For example, he tells the parable of the Sower, and immediately follows it with other parables (the parables of the Wheat and the Tares, the Mustard Seed, and the Candle under a Bushel, depending on which Gospel’s Sower parable we read) that express this lesson. Milton creates a similar pattern in *Paradise Lost*. He portrays his parable (which outlines the position of Satan compared to that of Adam and Eve as a couple), and then he offers readers another example—Adam and Eve as individuals—through which readers can interpret the lesson of his parable.

In this chapter, I discuss how readers see themselves in the positions of Adam and Eve, which is to say, how readers see themselves from a perspective that counters Satan’s point of view as well as from a perspective that highlights the relationship that Adam and Eve have with each other. By seeing themselves in the roles of Adam and Eve, as a

⁴⁹ See also Matthew 13: 37-42 and Mark 4: 14-20.

couple and as separate individuals, readers better understand how freedom and obedience are not mutually exclusive.

Part I: The Lesson of the Parable from the Perspective of the Younger Son

Craig Blomberg explains, “Its traditional title suggests that the main purpose of the [Prodigal Son] narrative is to encourage all sinners to repent, regardless of the extent to which they may have degraded themselves. This is the feature of the story which first strikes many readers, challenging their natural inclination to judge the prodigal severely. Yet many scholars would point to the second, climactic portion of the story and find the primary emphasis on the rebuke to the hardhearted older brother. Then the main point becomes one about the need to rejoice in the salvation of others” (172-173). As Blomberg suggests, the relationship between the characters drives the lesson of the parable. He further defines the lesson of the parable as it relates to all the characters:

(1) Even as the prodigal always had the option of repenting and returning home, so also all sinners, however wicked, may confess their sins and turn to God in contrition. (2) Even as the father went to elaborate lengths to offer reconciliation to the prodigal, so also God offers all people, however undeserving, lavish forgiveness of sins if they are willing to accept it. (3) Even as the older brother should not have begrudged his brother’s reinstatement but rather rejoiced in it, so those who claim to be God’s people should be glad and not mad that he extends his grace even to the most undeserving. (Blomberg 174)

John Dominic Crossan also comments on this parable and helps readers to see how the Prodigal Son parable is effective. He asks, “Can you imagine, asks Jesus, a vagabond and wastrel son being feted by his father and a dutiful and obedient son left outside in the cold? The story has not been loaded on either side, and it is left untold whether the elder son finally relents and goes inside after the father comes out to entreat him. One feels understanding for the position of all three protagonists [father, older son, and younger son], but in the end the parable shows a prodigal son inside feasting and a dutiful son outside pouting” (Crossan, *In Parables* 74). *Paradise Lost* asks readers to consider similar questions related to the characters in the poem.

To see how Milton invites this kind of questioning, it is useful to refer to Leland Ryken’s succinct overview of the Prodigal Son parable:

The parable also emphasizes the human responsibility in the divine-human relationship. Misery is shown to result from [humanity’s] sinful acts. The younger son would have been better off if he had never left his father in the first place. His sin is self-assertion—a declaration of independence from his father. The parable also shows the human responsibility to seek forgiveness through conversion and repentance. Finally, the parable is an exposure of the ugly attitudes of people who refuse to share the joy of others and who do not understand the true nature of forgiveness.

(Literature of the Bible 314)

This characterization also works well for describing the plot of *Paradise Lost*. Like the younger son in the parable, Adam and Eve ostensibly would have been better off had they

obeyed God's command not to eat the fruit. That is, they would not have suffered the immediate consequences of their actions. The Lukan son would not have worked as a swineherd, while Adam and Eve would not have been "subject[ed . . .] To sensual Appetite" after the Fall (9.1129). At the same time, it was these actions that led to the younger son's and Adam and Eve's ultimate blessings. As this comparison further illustrates, like the younger son, Adam and Eve learn from their disobedience and seek repentance and forgiveness. Lastly, throughout the poem, they contrast Satan, a character who, like the older brother in the Biblical parable, does not share in their repentance or their grace. As they are opposed to Satan, Adam and Eve function as a pair, as a single figure. It is in viewing the two as a pair that we can best see the parallel to the younger son in the parable of the Prodigal Son.

Satan transforms himself into an "Artificer of fraud" (4.121) and becomes an enemy of humanity as well as an enemy of God. God and the Son use the generic noun "man" to signify humanity. God narrates Satan's actions to the Son, explaining how Satan heads

Directly towards the new created World,
 And Man there plac't, with purpose to assay
 If him by force he can destroy, or worse,
 By some false guile pervert; and shall pervert
 For man will heark'n to his glozing lyes,
 And easily transgress the sole Command,
 Sole pledge of his obedience. (3.89-95)

This commentary and use of the term “man” obviously relates to both Adam and Eve, especially as Satan confronts only Eve in the garden. This point is repeated when God declares that humanity shall find grace because “Man falls deceiv’d / By the other first” (3.131-132). Since both Adam and Eve are deceived by another, again the masculine noun seems to apply to Adam and Eve as a pair. Satan demonstrates how the word “man” represents both Adam and Eve when he declares, “Ah gentle pair, yee little think how nigh / Your change approaches” and advances toward Adam and Eve as a pair (4.366-367).

The discussion of grace and salvation in the poem also suggests that we should read Adam and Eve as a pair representative of humanity. God uses the masculine noun to apply to all of humanity when he declares “Man shall not quite be lost, but sav’d” (3.173) and then continues to explain how humanity will be saved by using plural pronouns. He tells the Son that:

Some I have chosen of peculiar grace

 And I will place within them as a guide
 My Umpire *Conscience*, whom if they will hear,
 Light after light well us’d they shall attain,
 And to the end persisting, safe arrive. (3.183-197)

The response of the Son also emphasizes the joint role Adam and Eve play in the poem. In Christian tradition, Christ comes to save all who believe, and salvation is not related to gender. As Paul writes in the Acts of the Apostles and in his letter to the Romans,

“whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved,” “the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe,” and “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God” (Acts 2:21, Romans 3:22, Romans 8:16). The Son in *Paradise Lost* offers the same promise of grace and salvation to all humanity:

Father, thy word is past, man shall find grace;
 And shall grace not find means, that finds her way,
 The speediest of thy winged messengers,
 To visit all thy creatures, and to all
 Comes unprevented, unimplor'd, unsought (3.227-231)

His emphasis on “all” underscores the plurality of people represented by a single pronoun. It helps us to read “Man” as Adam and Eve, and, in turn, to think of Adam and Eve as embodying a single perspective.

Seeing Adam and Eve as a pair representing one position is also helpful when we consider how they are compared to Satan. We see a contrast between their perspectives and Satan’s point of view as Satan responds to God differently than Adam and Eve do. Satan refuses to praise to the Son, calling adoration of the Son “prostration vile” (5.782), whereas Adam and Eve bow together to pray before heading to their bower. As a pair, “both stood, / Both turnd, and under op’n Skie ador’d / The God that made both Skie, Air, Earth and Heav’n” (4.720-722). We also see the distinction between these characters and their roles when God tells the Son, “he [Satan] had of mee / All he could have; I made him just and right, / Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall” (3.97-99) and uses

this fact as the basis for Satan's damnation. In contrast, God declares that Adam and Eve shall receive forgiveness, despite their fall. God explicitly contrasts the position of Adam and Eve with that of Satan: "Man therefore shall find grace, / The other none" (3.130-131). This explicit contrast between Satan and Adam and Eve posits them in the places of the older and younger sons, respectively, in the Prodigal Son parable. The older son does not seek grace, and does not find it; the younger son does seek grace, and does receive it. Furthermore, the Son highlights the role Adam and Eve jointly represent as the younger son when he asks God:

For should Man finally be lost, should Man
 Thy creature late so lov'd, thy youngest Son
 Fall circumvented thus by fraud, though joynd
 With his own folly? (3.150-153)

Just as the father in the Biblical parable commands, "Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found," God explains that "Man shall not quite be lost" (Luke 15:22-24; 3.173).

Part II: A New Understanding of Marriage in *Paradise Lost*

As noted above, Adam and Eve can be read in two ways: they can be understood together as a pair that represents the perspective of the younger son in the Lukan parabolic model, and they can also be understood individually as two separate people who each represent opposite perspectives. The relationship between Adam and Eve as

individuals is a microcosm of the larger parable of *Paradise Lost*. Adam and Eve both represent different, opposing perspectives throughout the poem (although their perspectives are not antagonistic until after the fall). However, unlike the larger parable, where Satan makes a different decision than the human pair, Adam and Eve as contrasting individuals both make the same final decision and both petition for grace. Seeing this revision of the Prodigal Son parable, where the two opposing individuals come to the same decision, is a model for how readers should interpret the larger parable.

Much has been written about Adam and Eve and their roles in *Paradise Lost*. Other interpretations of *Paradise Lost* emphasize gender inequality in Milton's depiction of Adam and Eve. John Shawcross argues, for example, that the Fall in *Paradise Lost* is an "indication of male 'superiority': the fate of humankind would not rest on woman alone. For Milton it rests on woman and man, and man is the more grievous cause; for other men, woman becomes simply the scapegoat to deflect guilt from man's desire" (Shawcross 203). Similarly, Mary Nyquist suggests *Paradise Lost* is a tale of gender subjectivity and that Milton exhibits an interest in masculine priority (107). She suggests Adam and Eve do not demonstrate a mutuality, but rather depict a gendered hierarchy where Adam is valued and prioritized over Eve (Nyquist 111). Nyquist argues "Milton's understanding of the first institution [of marriage] is implicitly both contractual and masculinist" and that it creates a type of individualism that is "paradigmatically masculine" (114, 115).

In contrast with these interpretations, Susanne Woods asserts that "Far from being a misogynist, Milton was ahead of his time in granting to women a dignity and

responsibility rarely conceded in the seventeenth century” (15). She claims “Milton’s profound respect for human liberty has the ultimate effect of subverting his patriarchal assumptions” (Woods 19). Similarly, Diane Kelsey McColley suggests Milton’s depiction of marriage is centered on the “mutual completion” that Adam and Eve bring each other (*Milton’s Eve* 22). For McColley, Adam and Eve do not demonstrate “unison [or sameness,] but ‘harmonie’” (*Milton’s Eve* 22). She argues, “For Milton the whole cosmos is expressed in full reciprocity as an interanimation of the sexes corresponding to the microcosm of human marriage” (McColley, *Milton’s Eve* 46). She suggests Milton “is committed to preserving the harmony and coherence of an ordered cosmos and the typology of marriage as a resemblance of Christ and the church” (McColley, *Milton’s Eve* 35). McColley understands the poem as a demonstration that both Adam and Eve have unique gifts and talents, that their individual attributes create a “sphere of unique action through the service which is perfect freedom,” and that they have a mutual identity in relation to each other (*Milton’s Eve* 38). Turner suggests that Milton stops short of depicting gender equality. He notes that “Milton was obviously very moved by the ideal of equality,” but that he does not present a theory of Christianity that embraces a doctrine of complete gender equality (Turner 217). Instead, Turner argues that Milton’s portrayal of Eve suggests that “only the woman is obliged to be mutual” (221) and that “Femaleness is conceived not as a alternative and complementary mode of humanity but as a lower form of existence” (226), whereas Milton “conflated male supremacy with the ‘image of God’ itself” (218).

As the above analyses indicate, readers often approach the poem through either Adam or Eve. David Mikics explains that “we follow Eve in her bold susceptibility to experience” and “we ally ourselves to Adam’s wariness about experience, and his guarded loyalty to God’s commands” (21). Milton shows value in both Adam’s and Eve’s actions and characteristics, but also suggests that readers feel “tempted” to choose between them (Mikics 22). Such readings privilege either Adam or Eve as they pit Adam and Eve against each other. This approach is useful as it helps readers to understand the different perspectives of the characters; however, I wish to emphasize how the characters work together as well as apart. Instead of analyzing the differences between Adam and Eve in order to determine who is more culpable for the Fall, I would like to explore what Adam, Eve, and readers learn from the Fall. I am not interested in reading *Paradise Lost* through a lens of gender theory or in defending Milton as a feminist thinker or criticizing him as a misogynistic author; instead, I am interested in the way he develops mutuality and freedom in the social context of marriage. I am interested in how Milton uses marriage as an illustrative metaphor for free will in his parable.

Although I am not going to critique Milton as a misogynist or defend him as a feminist, it is important to consider how Milton repeats or alters the common assumptions about marriage. Some Biblical language, like the suggestion in Ephesians, “exalts the male and puts the female into an inferior position” and determines that wives should be subject to the authority of their husbands: “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject

unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing” (Shawcross 206; Eph. 5:22-24). Likewise, in Colossians the text reads, “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them” (3:18-19). These Biblical texts provided future generations of Christians with evidence that “the ends for which wives had been created [were]: for procreation, for ‘lawfull Remedie against whoredom,’ for comfort in sickness and affliction, and for taking care of household worries and troubles” (Duncan 163). Echoes of this model were found in sermons, homilies, and conduct books. According to many popular Protestant ideas, patriarchy was essential for a productive, marriage, family, and society. Robert Cleaver’s popular advice distinguishes between the roles and duties of husbands and wives. A husband’s duty is “first to loue his wife as his owne flesh. Then to gouerne her in all duties, that properly concerne the state of marriage, in knowledge, in wisdom, in iudgement, and iustice. Thirdly, to dwell with her. Fourthly, to vse her in all due beneuolence honestly, soberly, and chastly” (Cleaver). In contrast, a wife’s duty is “in all reuerence and humilitie, to submit and subiect her selfe to her Husband, in all such duties as properly belong vnto marriage. Secondly, therein to be an helpe vnto him, according to Gods ordinance. Thirdly, to obey his commandements in all things, which he may command by the authoritie of an Husband. Fourthly and lastly, to giue him beneuolence” (Cleaver). These lessons emphasized the hierarchical relationship between husband and wife. This kind of prescriptive gendered relationship established a role for obedience, especially on the part of the woman. In such a relationship, roles, responsibilities, and

decision-making ability were based primarily on gender, and since male gender was privileged, the husband was the spouse most able to exercise free will.

In *Paradise Lost*, Milton both questions and subscribes to these assumptions. Milton's poem portrays Adam and Eve as almost equal, but still employs patriarchal imagery. Annabel Patterson comments on Milton's literalist reading of Genesis 1:27 (289). She points to 1 Corinthians 11, which mentions gender hierarchy and the idea "that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man," and she suggests that Milton adopted the idea that "woman was purposely made for man [. . . that] man was the portraiture of God [. . . and that] Man was created as valuable in himself; woman, only by occasion of his loneliness" (Patterson 289). Thomas Luxon also comments on how marriage was created for Adam; as Luxon notes, "Wedded love [. . .] is peculiar to men and women, and created specifically *for Man*" (41). Milton derives his understanding of the mutual necessity and compatibility of marriage and spirituality from Genesis: "And the LORD God said, it is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a help meet for him" (Genesis 2:18). The idea of a help meet is essential to Milton's conception of marriage. In *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, Milton argues, "Marriage [. . .] if it was not commanded, was at any rate instituted, and consisted in the mutual love, delight, help and society of husband and wife, though with the husband having greater authority" (1181). He displays this philosophy in *Paradise Lost* through Adam's description of Eve as "th' inferiour" (8.541), a sentiment echoed in the narrator's assertion that Adam and Eve are "Not equal, as thir sex not equal seemed; / For

contemplation hee and valour formd, / For softness shee and sweet attractive Grace” and the claim that Adam was made “for God only, shee for God in him” (4.296-298, 299).⁵⁰

At the same time, Milton undermines a strictly hierarchal relationship by emphasizing Adam and Eve’s similarities. God describes Eve as Adam’s “likeness, [his] fit help, [his] other self, / [His] wish exactly to [his] hearts desire” (8.450-451). God creates Eve as a partner with whom Adam can “Expre[ss] well the spirit within [him] free” and with whom he can find “fellowship” and “companie” (8.440, 442, 446). Milton suggests that marriage should reflect “the true dignity of man,” which is inherent from humanity’s creation in the image of God (Genesis 1:27; *Tetrachordon*, 1029). Since he believes that God created marriage because “It is not good that man should be alone,” he argues that enduring “a wearisom life of unloving & unquiet conversation” is not a cure for loneliness (Genesis 2:18; Milton, *Tetrachordon* 1030). This kind of life does not constitute a marriage. Furthermore, he asserts, “God is no deceitfull giver, to bestow that on us for a remedy of lonelines, which if it bring not a sociable minde as well as a conjunctive body, leavs us no lesse alone then before” (Milton, *Tetrachordon* 1033). Rather, Milton claims, “we may conclude that such a mariage, wherein the minde is do disgrac’t and vilify’d below the bodies interest, and can have no just or tolerable contemntment, is not of Gods institution, and therefore [is] no marriage” (*Tetrachordon* 1033). These views emphasize mutuality and equality, rather than hierarchy.

⁵⁰ Eve repeats this sentiment when she tells Adam:
 what thou bidst
 Unargu’d I obey; so God ordains,
 God is thy Law, thou mine: to know no more
 Is womans happiest knowledge and her praise. (4.635-638)

While the depictions of Adam and Eve as mutual may be appealing, these depictions are distracting from Milton's point about reciprocity in relationships. These descriptions focus on how they are similar, which encourages us to see them acting in concert as a pair. Interestingly, it is the hierarchical descriptions that remind readers that Adam and Eve are individuals, and it is through seeing them as individuals that we more completely learn Milton's ideas of free will. Although Adam declares to Eve, "Our State cannot be severd, we are one, / One Flesh; to loose thee were to loose my self," they clearly do not act as one and, as Milton demonstrates, they cannot function as one without considering the other person (9.958-959). To function effectively as a pair, they must not put their own needs and desires first. By exploring this aspect of Adam and Eve's relationship, and considering the connection between individually and unity, we see more fully how Milton understands free will.

Adam and Eve seem to recognize each other as individuals, but they do not act reasonably according to this knowledge. That is, they address each other in ways that elevate the other, yet they do not act in ways that value the other. Adam calls Eve "Sole partner and sole part of all these joyes, / Dearer thy self then all" (4.411-412) and in return she declares:

O thou for whom
 And from whom I was formd flesh of thy flesh,
 And without whom am to no end, my Guide
 And Head. (4.440-443)

Similarly, Adam refers to Eve as his “Fair Consort” and “My fairest, my espous’d, my latest found, / Heav’ns last best gift, my ever new delight” (4.610, 5.18-19), whereas she calls him “My Author and Disposer” and “Sole in whom my thoughts find all repose, / My Glorie, my Perfection” (4. 635, 5.28-29). Despite these displays of affection and consideration, they do not treat each other in ways fitting these declarations. Instead, as is evident in the repetition of “my” and the way in which they describe the other in terms of themselves, they focus on themselves. It is this selfishness that leads to the fall, but that also ultimately leads to their greater understanding of reciprocity and free will.

In the moment of eating the fruit, Adam and Eve act according to selfish desires rather than according to godly desires. By fulfilling their selfish wants, they also become like the younger son in the Prodigal Son parable. Milton shows the detriment of being absorbed in one’s self. In Book 9, both Adam and Eve have moments where they are acutely aware of and concerned with themselves. Previous images of a communal marriage are contrasted with the selfishness Adam and Eve both exhibit during the Fall. In contrast to the mutuality they demonstrate earlier in the poem, in Book 9 Adam and Eve demonstrate greed and selfishness, behaviors that do not exist in a relationship based on spiritual principals and mutual concern. Eve “Greedily [. . .] ingorg’d without restraint” while Adam eats the fruit “not deceav’d, / But fondly overcome with Femal charm” (9.791, 998-999). Both ingest the fruit to fulfill their own desires.

Furthermore, Eve is selfish in her reason for offering Adam the fruit. She resolves to give Adam the fruit, in part, because she is concerned about her own fate without him.

She argues:

but what if God have seen
 And Death ensue? then I shall be no more,
 And *Adam* wedded to another *Eve*,
 Shall live with her enjoying, I extinct;
 A death to think. (9.826-830)

Her action is based on her own self-interest; she acts because she is concerned about her own future, not because she is concerned about his future without her.

Adam, likewise, is concerned first with himself and his future, rather than with Eve's. He ponders:

How can I live without thee, how forgoe
 Thy sweet Converse and Love so dearly joyn'd,
 To live again in these wilde Woods forlorn?
 Should God create another *Eve*, and I
 Another Rib afford, yet loss of thee
 Would never from my heart. (9.908-913)

As this declaration suggests, Adam is concerned about himself, not primarily about Eve. This selfish behavior causes Adam to misalign his obedience. Adam is “unfinished without Eve” and, as Michael Schoenfeldt explains, Adam “falls because he feels a physiological and emotional link to Eve that belies the moral autonomy that would allow him to stand” (Turner 283; Schoenfeldt 373). Similarly, Gladys Willis suggests that “Just as Eve errs in thinking that all happiness is in her newly gained knowledge, Adam errs in

thinking of Eve as the end, rather than the individual whom God created for him to be a means [of fulfilling his “spiritual quest” and a means of achieving “communion with God”]. Adam thinks that if he loses Eve, all is lost, not that if he loses God all is lost” (94).

Adam and Eve more conspicuously exhibit selfish behavior after the fall. Adam tells Eve, “Much pleasure we have lost, while we abstain’d / From this delightful Fruit” (9.1022-1023), again commenting on their selfish interests and the desires they have denied themselves. What they learn from their fall, however, is that indulging in selfish behavior does not induce joy. Instead of feeling lasting happiness from their selfish gratification, they feel misery. They angrily argue and blame each other for their situation, continuing to think primarily about their own conditions. Instead of acknowledging their own behavior, they focus on the other person’s actions.

By observing Adam and Eve’s argument in Book 9, readers see the error of Adam and Eve’s selfish actions. In fact, their selfish behavior and their decisions to fall enable readers to reflect on themselves. Adam’s humanity offers readers an opportunity to reflect on their own humanity and to consider both the difficulty and importance of making thoughtful decisions. Milton’s depiction of Adam and Eve’s selfish actions and consequential self-awareness also helps readers identify with the characters and better recognize the role free will plays in humanity’s relationship with God. Adam’s comparison of Eve to Satan helps readers understand the nature of selfishness. Adam calls Eve “Serpent” and blames her “pride / And wandring vanitie” for his disobedience

(10.867, 874-875). He also questions his creation:

Did I request thee, Maker, from my Clay
 To mould me Man, did I sollicite thee
 From darkness to promote me, or here place
 In this delicious Garden? (10.743-746)

In these speeches, he focuses on his own situation and suffering, rather than on his relationship with Eve or with God.

In contrast with this question, Adam recognizes his fault and bemoans:

O miserable of happie! is this the end
 Of this new glorious World, and mee so late
 The Glory of that Glory, who now becom
 Accurst of blessed, hide me from the face
 Of God, whom to behold was then my highth
 Of happiness: yet well, if here would end
 The miserie, I deserv'd it, and would beare
 My own deservings; but this will not serve;
 All that I eat or drink, or shall beget,
 Is propagated curse. (10.720-728)

In addition to admitting his culpability, he also learns from Eve the distinction between selfishness and self-awareness as she takes responsibility for the Fall: “On me, sole cause to thee of all this woe, / Mee mee onely just object of his ire” (10.935-936). In this declaration, Eve echoes the Son’s proclamation, “on mee let thine anger fall,” and

implicitly rejects the influence of Satan (3.237). Following this confession, Adam offers contrition and suggests they take responsibility for their actions and ask each other for forgiveness:

let us no more contend, nor blame
 Each other, blam'd enough elsewhere, but strive
 In offices of Love, how we may light'n
 Each others burden in our share of woe. (10.958-961)

Although Adam and Eve at first act like Satan, they ultimately reject his logic and seek forgiveness. This lesson is central to Milton's ideas on free will. As John Ulreich explains, "In Milton's Christian humanist terms, spiritual freedom is always a paradox: perfect freedom consists in filial submission to the divine will, enthrallment to God, the 'Author' of one's being. The alternative to obedience is satanic enslavement to one's own will, self-chosen but finally self-destructive" ("Argument Not Less" 77). Adam and Eve come to this understanding and decide to abandon their self-enslavement to instead be obedient to God. They use their free will to seek forgiveness and to align their wills with God's will. In this way, Adam and Eve fulfill the role of the younger son in the parable of the Prodigal Son. They learn not to act based on their own self-interest, but instead to act according to their relationship with God.

Adam and Eve's conclusions counter Satan's logic and the conclusion he draws. Satan offers an argument that appears to draw Eve closer to God: "Ye Eate thereof, your Eyes that seem so cleere, / Yet are but dim, shall perfetly be then / Op'nd and cleerd, and ye shall be as Gods" (9.706-708). Instead of being a means of becoming more like God

and thus closer to God, however, eating the fruit separates Eve from God. Satan's advice encourages a focus on individuality that separates Eve from Adam and from God. Satan suggests that individuality at the expense of mutuality is justified because he sees mutuality as a burden: "But what if better counsels might erect / Our minds and teach us to cast off this Yoke?" (5.784-786)⁵¹ However, this image of the yoke serves to explain why a yoked relationship is not necessarily a burden. This image of the yoke is closely associated with marriage. As David Cressy explains, "Religious and secular authors alike used images of yokes, knots, and bonds in discussions of matrimony. The familiar image of a yoke was especially powerful, evoking a device that secured harmony and balance between two forces while combining their effort to a common end. 'Conjugal' relations were those that came together under the yoke of matrimony" (297).⁵² This symbol of the yoke is one Milton uses in *Tetrachordon* as well. He advocates for Christian liberty by arguing that marriage should be understood "not by a forc'd yoke, but by an impartial definition [. . . which is determined by] our Saviours direction" (1029). From this description, it seems that it is the idea of being "forced" into a situation, not the image of the yoke itself, that is problematic for Milton. The idea of a yoke does suggest a type of restriction, but Milton has demonstrated that restriction, in the form of obedience, is desirable. In fact, he follows this use of the word "yoke" with a remark that we are "free

⁵¹ Satan also mentions God's yoke in 4.975 and Abdiel uses the metaphor in 5.882. References to yoke also appear in 2.256, 10.307, and 10.1045.

⁵² In contrast, Sid Ray suggests that "When [. . .] marriage tract writers repetitively insist that marriage is a knot rather than a union, a bond rather than a covenant, they evoke the sense that marriage is a way of controlling behavior instead of promoting companionship and domestic harmony. Knots, after all, are deployed to contain things—to curtail movement, control actions and prevent people or objects from exceeding certain boundaries" (Ray 18). Milton seems not to use knot imagery as an unjust restraint, but as an image evoking submission that is freely accepted.

custody of [Christ's] love" (Milton, *Tetrachordon* 1029). Milton rejects this notion of a restricting yoke. Instead, Milton sees relationships with others and with God as a burden only if they are not based on reason or free will.

Conclusion

Susan Hardman Moore reminds us of Thomas Hooker's argument that "Marriage gave a pattern for the soul's yielding to God, and emphasized the mutuality of love between Christ and the soul. It gave a vocabulary for expressing God's closeness that did not threaten his transcendence: 'he that is the Judge of the world, is your Husband, your beloved, and you are his: let nothing therefore dismay your hearts.' The invitation to marriage was an invitation to intimacy" (182). Milton argues for similar aspects of marriage. His depiction of Adam and Eve is linked to the type of mutuality that he believes is innate to Christianity. What Adam and Eve learn from their fall is how reciprocity works in relationships. They learn that selfishness does not align with reciprocal behavior. They learn that they must put the other first in action, not just in word.

Furthermore, they learn that they must put God above all else. Both Adam and Eve learn that obedience to God leads to a successful relationship with each other. This sensibility fits with the message in the Prodigal Son parable. In the Lukan text, both sons should be obedient to their father; they should not primarily be concerned with each other. In the parable, the older brother is concerned with the younger brother and with his father's reaction to younger brother, and both sons are more concerned with themselves than with their father (although the younger son does humble himself before his father at

the conclusion of the parable). Like the brothers in the Prodigal Son parable, Eve is at first concerned with herself, not with Adam or God, and she chooses to eat the fruit to fulfill her own desires. Similarly, upon hearing of Eve's disobedient act of eating the fruit, Adam is primarily concerned with himself and thus chooses to follow her; he questions his future in relation to Eve, but he is not essentially concerned with her. Their selfishness is directly related to their lack of knowledge regarding their obedience. As Schoenfeldt explains, obedience "involves not just doing what you are told, but using reason to figure out what authority you are supposed to follow, and to ascertain what you are supposed to do according to a higher moral code" (379). Before the Fall, Adam and Eve did not use reason to understand their obedience. After the Fall, they both learn to consider which authority to follow and why. This lesson on reason and obedience also is found in the parable of the Prodigal Son. In the Biblical parable, the older son does not seem to consider the act or purpose of his obedience; he just unhappily follows his father. In contrast, the younger son does not consider his father; he instead thinks of himself and wastes his inheritance (although he does show consideration when he repents). This connection between reason and obedience fulfills Milton's ideas on Christian Liberty. Anthony Low explains this connection. He asserts that "Milton's particular version of objectivity rests only on the direct inspiration of God to the individual, not on custom, tradition, Church teachings, ministerial authority, consensus among a congregation, or instruction within a family. God the Father simply inserts His 'Umpire conscience' directly into the individual soul, and nothing more is needed" (Low 141). At the end of

the poem, Adam and Eve learn to follow their conscience and they learn that they need to focus on God, not on each other.

Just as a Biblical parable teaches an unexpected lesson, *Paradise Lost* presents an unanticipated view of marriage as a reciprocal relationship that requires selflessness, rather than equality. This relationship between Adam and Eve in *Paradise Lost* is, as W. Gardner Campbell suggests, “Milton’s way of suggesting that likeness, harmony, true delight, collateral love, alterity, and hierarchy need not be mutually exclusive; indeed, they may be mutually enriching” (57). But they can only be enriching once the relationship between Adam and Eve is understood. The idea that Adam and Eve need each other for completion and perfection is fallacious: what (or who) they need is God.

Adam tells Michael:

Henceforth I learne, that to obey is best,
 And love with feare the onely God, to walk
 As in his presence, ever to observe
 His providence, and on him sole depend. (12.561-564)

Learning this lesson to put God first is, according to Michael, “the summe / Of wisdom” (12.575-576).

Furthermore, putting God first is an act of reciprocity. It invites God’s love, which, in turn, effects free will. Robert Fallon explains how divine love is essential to free will:

love is the single attribute of God upon which any justification of his ways must rest. Divine love is the central principle of all creation, the reciprocal

bond that makes it work, uniting its fallen and unfallen creatures in a celebration of existence; and although it may not lend itself to representation in a systematic theology devoted to forming ‘correct ideas about God guided by nature or reason’ (6:132), it is a quality appropriate to expression in poetry, whose music reaches out to an understanding beyond the merely rational. In the *Christian Doctrine*, Milton can only interpret God’s ways; in *Paradise Lost* he seeks to justify them, and he does so in terms of God’s love for humankind. (124-125)

Like Fallon, Willis also emphasizes the reciprocity of the relationship: “Marriage should be built upon the love of God and one’s neighbor. In the words of Milton, ‘The form of marriage consists in the mutual exercise of benevolence, love, help, and solace between the espoused parties, as the institution itself, or its definition, indicates.’ Otherwise, a man is not required to continue such a relationship, one which God has not sanctioned” (Willis 73). By comparing the love between God and humanity with the love humans have between themselves, marriage becomes a parable in miniature that echoes Milton’s larger parable and its lesson of free will. Milton’s ideas on individuality and free will enable us to understand marriage as a reciprocal relationship.

CHAPTER FIVE: *Paradise Lost* as Parable

What is surprising in the parable of the Prodigal Son in Luke is two-fold: the younger son's willingness to repent and the father's grace. What is surprising in the parable of *Paradise Lost* is three-fold: Satan's refusal to repent, Adam and Eve's choice to repent, and God's grace. In both stories, the grudging response of the older son figure is natural; it reflects our sensibilities of justice and fairness. What seems unnatural in both stories is the father figures' response of grace. In both parabolic narratives, the surprising situations teach readers about free will and grace. Through reading these parables, readers learn that grace works in unexpected ways. As Robert Funk explains, readers are surprised by grace as they recognize their relationship to it:

from an encounter with grace one learns what grace is by learning that he is a sinner. One cannot be grasped without the other. Consequently, it is all the same whether Jesus points to outcasts, to the righteous, or to God: those who stand in his audience will be able to identify themselves only as they understand his word of grace. And when they hear that word they will know. They will know not only who they are but who God is. They will understand themselves as sinners claimed by grace only when they know what God is; they will know what God is only when they understand themselves as sinners claimed by grace. (*Language* 16)

According to Funk, readers need perspective to learn the lesson of the narrative. In Milton's narrative, readers learn from associating themselves with the perspectives of the characters. By doing so, they learn, as Funk suggests, who they are, what decisions they

would make, and who God is. In fact, they learn to understand God's ways, which, of course, is what Milton asserts is the reason for writing his poem (1.26). The ways of God, I have suggested throughout this dissertation, are embodied by free will. Milton expresses this lesson parabolically.

The idea of reading *Paradise Lost* as a parabolic narrative derives from the multiple voices and perspectives in the text. Beverley Sherry notes that "Since its first reception, *Paradise Lost* has been seen by some notable readers as a poem at odds with itself." (78) She specifically notes that Milton's poem "has been studied as a poem of 'contending interpretive voices' (Sauer 71), 'multiple perspectives' (Lewalski 54), 'counter-currents' (Strier 192), 'a chorus of individual and sometimes discordant voices' which produce 'competing narratives' (Evans 113, 142), [and] a poem in which 'opposing stresses and signals represent the rule, rather than the exception' (Lieb 117)" (Sherry 78). These attributes teach readers how to read the poem. Carol Barton asserts that "the fit readers of *Paradise Lost* will come away from the text knowing not only what is wrong with the rationalizations offered by Satan, Adam, and Eve, and why (regardless of how seductively plausible it may seem to be at the outset) the reasoning of their exculpations is specious, 'but also how to perform similar critical acts [themselves] in the future'" (Barton). For this reason, the poem functions like a parable.

Parables, as David Lawton understands them, are important tools for interpreting abstract metaphoric language. Lawton establishes a relationship between parables,

reading, and interpretation:

Parabolic competence is competence in metaphor: for only metaphor can describe what ‘we see not’ [. . .] For belief is metaphor. The competence they [the disciples] lack is the competence to understand parabolic discourse—which is metaphorical discourse, which is the language of the poetic. The competence they lack, the competence they need, is—in one word—reading. (143)

Readers of *Paradise Lost* gain parabolic competence as they read the poem. That is, they understand the parable as they learn to interpret the metaphoric imagery in the poem.

Furthermore, interpreting *Paradise Lost* as a parabolic text enables readers to attain spiritual growth. Lawton suggests that “parables are [. . .] the means by which competence in belief is acquired” (141, 143). Readers learn not only religious terms and ideas, but also definitions of religious precepts and ways to apply them. According to Lawton, Christian belief comes through the process of parabolic interpretation; in *Paradise Lost*, knowledge comes the same way.

Stanley Fish declares that “liberty [is . . .] the right kind of bondage” (Fish lxiv), while David Mikics explains, “The right kind of bondage means willing obedience to the word of God, the source of all human freedom” (Mikics 31). Furthermore, it is not just obedience to the word of God, although reading is clearly important to Milton, but also to the will of God. For Milton, Michael Schoenfeldt asserts, “obedience is not a function of servility but rather the highest form of ethical autonomy. While blind, unthinking obedience to authority is in many ways worse than disobedience, willed obedience to the

higher authority of reason is an unequivocal good” (366). As Joseph Duncan indicates, “The liberty of the individual—in marriage, worship and society—was the lifelong concern of Milton [. . .] The essence of the perfection of this state was the free exercise of Right Reason, the true basis of all human customs or institutions. The perfect marriage celebrated in paradise was the beginning and the center of perfect worship and of the perfect society. These convictions are explicit in Milton’s prose works; they are deeply implicit in *Paradise Lost*” (175).

Readers come to Milton’s garden with an understanding of the implications of this place as established by other garden imagery throughout the Bible. Milton makes allusions to Biblical gardens in order to offer readers a telescopic view of the garden. Robert Reiter reminds us that Milton and his contemporaries “would allude to an Old Testament person or event and expect the reader to grasp the typological significance of the person or event in the traditional typological interpretation” (568). Milton expects readers to recognize Eden as a place that offers lessons on God, free will, and the paradise within. Milton’s Eden deepens readers’ understanding of the Biblical garden as a place for gaining self-awareness and helps readers grasp the idea of the garden as a place to have a relationship with God.

Milton’s garden also demonstrates that being able to read correctly and being able to fully understand a text is important for making good decisions. Not only does Milton’s Eden instruct readers how to read, but also it teaches readers what to read: the lesson of free will Milton’s parable. In Eden, Adam and Eve learn that the garden is a way to

understand one's relationship with God, but it is not the only way to *have* a relationship with God. As Michael explains:

Adam, thou know'st Heav'n his, and all the Earth,
 Not this Rock onely; his Omnipresence fills
 Land, Sea, and Aire, and every kinde that lives,
 Fomented by his virtual power and warmd:

 Yet doubt not but in Vallie and in Plaine
 God is as here, and will be found alike
 Present, and of his presence many a signe
 Still following thee, still compassing thee round
 With goodness and paternal Love, his Face
 Express, and of his steps the track Divine. (11.335-354)

Michael informs Adam that external place is a metaphor for a relationship with God, but does not embody the relationship itself. Michael further teaches this lesson and the significance of the garden by telling Adam that "God attributes to place / No sanctitie, if none be thither brought / By Men who there frequent, or therein dwell" (11.836-838). Michael explains that it is not the physical garden that God values, but what the garden symbolizes that is important. The basis of humanity's relationship with God is not the garden, but free will. Milton emphasizes this point by using Michael and Adam's conversation as a context for Adam and Eve's expulsion from the garden.

Adam and Eve's expulsion from the garden is a transformative moment. The landscape changes from lush to desolate as they journey out of their known environment and into the unknown. But while their knowledge of the physical environment decreases, their awareness of themselves and their relationship with God increases. Milton summarizes this idea in the poem's conclusion:

Som natural tears they drop'd, but wip'd them soon;
 The World was all before them, where to choose
 Thir place of rest, and Providence thir guide:
 They hand in hand with wandring steps and slow,
 Through *Eden* took thir solitarie way. (12.645-649)

As Michael leads Adam and Eve from Eden, the geography changes from garden to desert, lush to barren, and exotic to plain. Echoing Genesis, Adam and Eve witness Eden "Wav'd over by that flaming Brand, the Gate / With dreadful Faces throng'd and fierie Armes" (12.643-644). This destruction of their home and their origins elicits sorrow, but also arouses hope by reminding readers that free will also enables choice that aligns with God's will. The poem brings hope by reminding readers that help and salvation are their choice. For readers, as for Adam and Eve, "The World [is] all before them, where to choose [. . .] and Providence thir guide" (12.646-647). They can choose to follow or to abandon their guide.

The last lines of the poem are the crux of the parable. By definition, parables tell stories to elicit change or action; Milton's poem also tells a story to elicit change or action. As Milton's poem ends, the story depicts Adam and Eve transforming into "the

true warfaring Christian,” consciously choosing between good and evil (*Areopagitica* 1006). They must consciously assess their choices and decisions and intentionally align their actions with God’s will. They understand the freedom and responsibility they have to make decisions. As the parable ends, readers become acutely aware that they face the same situation that Adam and Eve face: the poem has ended, and readers are now outside the garden in the poem as well as outside the original Eden. The lessons of the poem and the experiences of the characters become knowable and understandable on a personal level. Readers are like Adam and Eve, choosing where to go and what to do. Readers recognize that they are like Adam and Eve, with the freedom and responsibility to make decisions. This paradoxical combination of freedom and responsibility helps readers to recognize their position in the world and teaches them how to experience the depths of their faith.

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