Introduction

The message of *Paradise Lost* is: make love, not war. The poem that pretends to begin the epic tradition by retelling events that preceded those of all earlier epics would also end the epic genre by condemning its traditional subject matters, war and empire. The central human heroic act of the poem is Adam’s choosing love for Eve, his wife and fellow human being, over obedience to God. In making us think twice at all about this choice, in appearing even to ratify it, *Paradise Lost* revises its biblical subject matter just as radically as it revises epic. The Fall is fortunate not only because it allows the Son of God to offer himself to save humanity, but because it already anticipates the supersession of the Law by the Love and Liberty the Son will bring about by his example. Its obverse in the poem is Satan’s envious lust for power, his institution of monarchy in hell, and his readiness to enslave others. The Milton of *Paradise Lost* is a Christian humanist: his Christianity emphasizes the true empowerment of men and women as free moral agents.

These are the broad outlines of my reading of *Paradise Lost*, more and less familiar. In the broadest sense my argument has been anticipated by many commentators. Milton’s God, however, is in the details, and this book goes inside the epic by examining some of its intricacies: how verbal design and allusive conceit together shape its units of meaning. These are poems within the poem. The generic expectations of Renaissance epic that looked back to the model of the *Aeneid* required *Paradise Lost* to maintain over its vast length not only the loftiness of the high style but the semantic density and unity of a lyric. For this reason, few great epics like Milton’s were achieved, though many were attempted. This kind of epic was also expected to contain studied allusion in almost every verse, as Virgil was known to have imitated Homer, the Greek tragedians, and his own predecessors in Latin poetry. These expectations for the writer of the epic create expectations for the epic’s reader, who will hold in his or her memory word-patterns that form and repeat themselves through the course of the entire poem: the rustling wings of the fallen angels in hell in book 1 make a “hiss” (1.768) that already anticipates their final transformation nine books later into hissing serpents in book 10. The reader will also be responsive...
to the allusions embedded in the verses and responsible for integrating them into the poem’s meaning. That the outspoken angel Abdiel in book 5 is a version, via Girolamo Vida’s Christiad, of the Bible’s Nicodemus defending Jesus before the Sanhedrin characterizes Abdiel as a superior figure of zeal; it also allows us to grasp the larger analogy that Milton is drawing between Satan’s and the rebel angels’ refusal to acknowledge the Son and the understandable future skepticism and anger of the Jews with regard to the same Son. Such epic poems are preeminent examples of what Roland Barthes calls a “writerly” text, that is, a text that makes the reader do active and imaginative work in recomposing its meaning. Some assembly is required.1

The studies of Paradise Lost in this book show what such assembly can reveal about the poetic texture and pleasure of Milton’s epic. They uncover verbal arrangements and thought structures that bind together—in widening configurations—episodes, individual books, motifs that run through the larger poem, and motifs running through Milton’s still larger career. In many instances, I show how these designs are built by and through Milton’s allusions—to the Bible, to previous literature, particularly to the epic tradition (classical and modern), and to his own earlier poetry.2 Milton uses allusion to construct and unify the fictions of the poem: the discussion in chapter 2 of how allusions to the figure of Ulysses and to the myth of Scylla and Charybdis connect the various episodes of book 2 is perhaps the clearest, most systematic example. Such patterns have their own logic and tell their own stories, which complement and overlap with the larger narrative that embeds them. At times close to its surface, at others submerged, they can organize a whole book of the poem.3 Five of the eight chapters of my book (1, 2, 4, 7, and 8) demonstrate the poetic unity of single books at either end of the epic (1, 2, 3, 10, and the composite 11–12, originally a single book 10 in 1667). The other three chapters (3, 5, and 6) cover much of the poem that lies in between, and the book as a whole follows the narrative arc of Milton’s epic; I often return to its last books and ending. The second-order stories recounted through these designs—about poetry and idolatry, cosmology and materialism, envy and kingship, spiritual individualism versus loving community, death and choice, the status of women—turn out to be not secondary after all, but centrally constitutive to the meaning of Paradise Lost.

What is an allusion? In his classic essay on Lycidas, Northrop Frye writes that for a poet “the impulse to write can only come from previous contact with literature, and the formal inspiration, the poetic structure that crystallizes around the new event, can only be derived from other poems.”4 Poststructuralist thought, influenced by Barthes’s “death of the author,” conceives that a language or a tradition may write through a writer, and it labels this relationship with the catch-all term “intertextuality.” But the words on the page did not get there by themselves. Cutting a theoretical Gordian knot, Stephen Hinds has distinguished allusion from seemingly infinite intertextual connections and the
reduction of such connections to so many commonplaces. Instead, Hinds defines allusion as a reference, chosen by the author, to an earlier text or texts in order to produce an intended effect. Hinds accepts that the author’s intentions are finally unknowable, and that “the alluding poet is ultimately and necessarily a figure whom we ourselves read out from the text” (50)—that is to say, allusion lies in the mind of the text’s interpreter. The latter may be a version of Barthes’s “writerly reader,” but Hinds asks us to posit a poet whose “dialogue with the work of other poets can be a very private, self-reflexive, and almost solipsistic kind of dialogue” (49), an individual author who is alive and well.5 The readings of Miltonic allusion that follow claim to recover the intentions of a poet who, in these specific cases, cites or imitates earlier texts for calculated purposes and results. My critical task is to persuade my readers that these are instances of allusion so defined. I also want to show how much of the power and thought of Milton’s poetry can reside in its texture of allusions, how many of the challenges and pleasures of reading Paradise Lost derive from puzzling them out.

Let us begin with one complex but manageably brief example. In a passage in book 2 whose degree of irony is hard to determine, the fallen angels bow down and reverence Satan as a god for his volunteering to voyage through Chaos to earth to seduce Adam and Eve, putting himself at risk for their general safety and deliverance from hell. (When we realize in retrospect, in book 3, that Satan’s presenting himself for the mission has parodied the Son’s offer, through his future Passion, to deliver humanity from that mission’s consequences, the irony or lack of irony becomes that much harder to pin down.) The narrator comments that the devils have not lost all their virtue, as this respect that they show for their leader’s own virtue testifies. He then goes on to make a parenthetical aside:

Oh shame to men! Devil with devil damned
Firm concord holds, men only disagree
Of creatures rational, though under hope
Of heavenly grace: and God proclaiming peace,
Yet live in hatred, enmity, and strife
Among themselves, and levy cruel wars,
Wasting the earth, each other to destroy:
As if (which might induce us to accord)
Man had not hellish foes enow besides,
That day and night for his destruction wait.
(2.496–505)6

The sense of this grand invective seems clear enough. It is a paradox that human beings, who have hope of salvation, wage wars with each other while their real enemy is the devil, whose followers, though damned, live in concord with one another.
The passage, however, carefully looks back into the epic tradition, the tradition that, as Milton will complain in the invocation to book 9, has deemed wars to be its only heroic argument (9.28–29). In twelve stanzas (2–13) of book 7 of his Os Lusíadas (1571), the Portuguese epic poet Luís de Camões denounces Protestant schisms in Europe, but more generally inveighs against the wars that Christians—“Ó miseros Cristãos”—wage among themselves, sowing the teeth of Cadmus in internal strife (7.9), rather than coming together against their common Muslim enemy who, the poet notes, are completely united—“inteiros observantes”—on the score of waging war upon them (7.10). In Richard Fanshaw's 1655 translation, the poet enjoins Europeans to follow the example of his own crusading nation Portugal: “To scourge the arrogant Mahumetan / Your hands unite, your heads together lay” (7.13). The Camões passage, in turn, is modeled on an earlier, similar invective (17.73–79) in Ludovico Ariosto's 1532 version of the Orlando furioso, where the poet-narrator urges the European peoples—Spaniards, French, Swiss, and Germans—who are now fighting among themselves in Ariosto's war-ravaged Italy to turn their warfare against the infidel, to reconquer Jerusalem from the “renegades” who now possess it and recapture Constantinople from the Turks (17.75). If, he says to the kings of France and Spain, you want, respectively, to be called “most Christian” and “Catholic,” why are you killing Christians—“Se Cristianissimi esser voi volete / e voi altri Catolici nomati / perché di Cristo gli uomini uccidete?” (17.75)—when you could go fight against the Muslim threat? The heroes of the Orlando furioso are themselves engaged in such a war, the conflict fought by Charlemagne against Agramante, king of Biserta; Milton has already compared the devils to the latter's forces in book 1 (585–87). These epic forebears of Milton condemn contemporary war between Christians, but they are nevertheless sedulous to indite and glorify war that has the religious alibi of a crusade.

Milton's version of these earlier invectives substitutes the devil for the Mohammedan. It fits into a minor pattern in Paradise Lost that also finds Satan described as a Muslim potentate, labeled as a “sultan” (1.348; cf. “the soldan's chair” at 1.764), and the council of Pandaemonium a “dark divan” (10.457). The most notable instance has appeared in the opening lines of the same book 2, again through the use of allusion:

High on a throne of a royal state, which far
Outshone the wealth of Ormus and of Ind,
Or where the gorgeous East with richest hand
Showers on her kings barbaric pearl and gold,
Satan exalted sat …

(2.1–5)

These lines echo the description of the Calyph of Egypt, the main power against whom the heroes of the First Crusade in Torquato Tasso's Gerusalemme liberata (GL; 1581) will fight for the conquest of the holy city.
Egli in sublime soglio, a cui per cento
gradi eburnei s'ascende, altero siede;
e sotto lombra d'un gran ciel d'argento
porpora intesta d'or preme col piede,
e ricco di barbarico ornamento
in abito regal splender si vede;

(GL 17.10.1–6)

[He on a high throne, to which one climbs by a thousand ivory steps, exalted (proudly) sits; and beneath the shade of a great heavenly canopy of silver, presses his feet on purple cloth interwoven with gold, and is seen to shine, rich in barbaric ornament and royal state (attire).]

With a one-upmanship that is frequent in Miltonic allusion, Satan's pomp outshines the regal trappings of Tasso's Calyph, who incidentally numbers among his subject allies the kings of Hormuz (GL 17.25) and India (GL 17.28). One should not make too much of this orientalizing conceit: Satan and the devils are much more often described in terms of imperial and papal Rome and of the Stuart monarchy. Kingship, in fact, more than Islam, seems to be the real target here. Milton suggests that all earthly kings take their model from Satan, before whom their power in any case pales, and that there is no distinction between so-called Christian kings and Muslim despots to whom they may pretend to be opposed—they are all opposed to true Christianity.9

Another erasure of the difference between Christian and Muslim, but this time in the name of their common humanity, takes place in Milton's "O shame to men!" invective. These two allusive passages in book 2, which now appear linked to each other, group together Milton's three major sixteenth-century Christian epic predecessors, Ariosto, Camões, and Tasso, whose poems recount conflicts between European Christian and African and Asian, mostly Muslim, forces, and appeal to the model of crusader warfare. But Milton evokes these poets' alignment of the devil with the Mohammedan enemy in the book's opening verses only to correct it in his subsequent invective. His imitation of Ariosto and Camões includes rather than excludes Muslims among the human beings—"men"—who wage wars against each other instead of attending to their spiritual enemy, the devil. God, Milton writes in On Christian Doctrine (1.4), may ultimately reject the unbeliever, but he nonetheless bestows his grace on all (Works 14:146; CPW 6:192). In keeping with the general revision of epic in Paradise Lost, the book 2 passage condemns all human warfare, including crusades, and substitutes spiritual combat in its place: it is diabolic fraud rather than Muslim force of arms that we should fear. Nevertheless, the allusion itself makes the devil remind us of the Mohammedan and vice versa.

Allusion functions in Paradise Lost as another layer of metaphor, or perhaps the better analogy is to Milton's famous similes: it declares that a given
description, action, whole scene is like, or just as often unlike, its counterpart in another text. This example demonstrates some features of Milton's technique: the imitation of a passage from a poet that itself alludes to an earlier poet (Camões to Ariosto); its linking to another allusion, often nearby or in a structurally prominent position (the initial allusion to Tasso), to suggest a continuing conceit and formal arrangement; a rewriting, at times to the point of inversion, of the meaning of the work alluded to. The application of these earlier texts to his Genesis or pre-Genesis story, whose plot, of course, precedes theirs by thousands of years, is an instance of Milton's frequent use of allusion to reverse his belatedness to his literary predecessors and to claim priority over them—a point well made by Harold Bloom. But Milton's allusion, here as elsewhere, is more than a reaction of poetic anxiety. His address to contemporary men and women also brings the deep past up-to-date. By allusion, Milton places his poem within an ongoing literary history and a larger history, intellectual and political, in this case, the dilemma and contradictions that Christian thinkers, particularly sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Christians who inherited the pacifist tradition of Erasmus, faced in confronting militant Islam and their own crusading past. This history seems, if anything, more timely at the moment of my writing this study than when Milton composed his epic. But without recognizing and taking account of the allusions—they are not noted in modern editions—we would miss it altogether.

To begin with, the subject of Milton's condemnation: war. War comes first, to get it out of the way for love. *Paradise Lost* tells the story of two falls, which its reader is asked to compare and contrast. There is the unending fall of Satan and his followers, and there is the Fall—and spiritual regeneration—of Adam and Eve. The fall of the rebel angels, noisy and full of the martial paraphernalia and heroics of earlier epic, is over and done with at the poem's beginning: the defeated devils themselves have no more thirst for fighting epic battles. The poet-narrator invokes a Muse who was present from the first, that is, from the first verses of Genesis and its account of the Creation, and then, surprisingly, asks the Spirit to "Say first" (1.27)—and tell what happened still earlier. His prequel to the Bible allows Milton to manufacture, through the contrast between the self-tempting devils and the man and woman whom Satan deceives, a theological safety valve for humanity, and to rehearse, in parodic form, scenes from the older epics his own poem supersedes. The first and last similes of book 1 note the similarity of its portrait of the devils to sailors' yarns and fairy tales, and Raphael's account weaves the War in Heaven—a subject that is not scripturally attested except in its anticipation/replay of the apocalyptic battles of Revelation—into the fables of Milton's epic predecessors. The inset, retrospective form of Raphael's narrative places the celestial war in a literary as well as a chronological past before the action of *Paradise Lost* begins. Raphael finishes the story of Satan's fall at the end of book 6 and halfway through the poem, leaving its
second half to recount the fall of the first human couple, Milton’s new epic subject, quieter if more talky. When Raphael recounts God’s creation of the universe in book 7, and Adam recounts his and God’s joint creation of Eve in book 8 (in 1667 these were both part of a single book 7), Milton’s poem has caught up to the Muse and to Genesis at the poem’s opening. By the end of Paradise Lost, however, when Michael tells of Eden’s being swept away by the Flood, it may seem that its story of the human fall is itself receding into poetic fiction.

Satan’s story is the old epic dispensation, the search for temporal power as a zero-sum game driven by envy and the desire for glory above one’s peers. It can only culminate, if not be satisfied, in kingship, war, and destruction—and in alienation from God in a literal or mental hell, the latter identical to remorse, the “restless thoughts” that return to torment the despairing fallen angels as the hellhounds sired by Death return to torment Sin. It may imply, in Milton’s century of astronomical revolution, the alienation from God of the universe itself, a destructive reversion to the infinite, random, and Babelic Chaos that surrounds but is kept outside the walls of God’s new, orderly creation in Paradise Lost: epic warfare extended to a warring cosmos, to noise and non-meaning. The fall of Adam and Eve tells the story of the new dispensation of Milton’s epic: of how love between human beings, here exemplified in marital love, enables (or is enabled by) the love of God; of the experience of spiritual goods that exceed finite temporal ones; of hope for an existence beyond the finitude of death, summed up by Adam as “peace of thought.” Such love, in its fraternal, charitable form, also implies the political equality and liberty of a republic. In book 11, Milton’s God takes credit for the reconciliation and renewal of their love that Adam and Eve have worked hard to achieve in book 10, and the Son’s charity—his promise in book 3 of a future sacrifice for humanity repeated to the fallen couple in his book 10 oracle about the serpent and the woman’s seed—appears to have made it possible. So, to the contrary, God hardens the heart of Satan, who refuses his grace.

The Christian God’s new creative intervention and the poem’s declared project of theodicy may provide the necessary conditions for, yet feel almost extraneous to, the foregrounded choices between power and love. (Or we could say that the theodicy itself depends on whether we see God as power or as love.) By their own exercise of charity, Adam and Eve can attain a paradise within in place of the one they have lost; and love seems to fulfill—and thus relegate to an older Law—the divine command of obedience. Paradise Lost restores to humans the freedom of the angels who obey God: “we freely love, as in our will / To love or not; in this we stand or fall.” But this freedom and love are now directed first of all to relationships between human beings.

Even as the devil tries to draw God and the angels into the old epic battles, the human heroes engage in the new, more limited household world of their garden. The first couple fight, too, among themselves: the marital squabble of hurt feelings that leads Eve to separate herself from Adam and head for
the groves (where Satan lies in wait); the more serious exchange of mutual recriminations after they have both fallen. The War in Heaven, the biggest battle ever fought—so big that it mocks earlier epic and becomes mock-epic—is succeeded by battles of the sexes: these have their comical moments, too, in spite of their fraught circumstances. Milton changes his notes for tragic in book 9 when he must narrate the Fall, but, in spite of the bite that Death and his remorse take out of human existence, in spite of the prophecies in the last two books of the poem about war, kingship, empire, and misery in store for human history, Adam and Eve leave *Paradise Lost* cheered, officially by the happy ending of Christian promise, dramatically by the comic solution of marriage. No longer innocent, but now compromised human beings, they belong to the emergent world of the novel, the lower narrative genre of comic compromise that belongs to the subjected plain and domesticity to which they are headed, a literary world where small things must perforce stand in place of, and accomplish, great ones. Perhaps we are still in one kind of epic world after all: just as the Iliadic posturings of the devils in book 1 are replaced by their Odyssean fraud in book 2, so Milton's larger epic may at its halfway point replace the little *Iliad* of the War in Heaven with an *Odyssey* of marital reunion; but the *Odyssey*, as James Joyce understood and proved, is the prototype of the novel.

*Paradise Lost* starts with the devil. My first chapter shows how book 1 metapoetically depicts its own role in raising the rebel angels out of their "bottomless perdition" (1.46), an act of poetic creation analogous to the divine creation of the universe described in the invocation—"how the heavens and earth / Rose out of chaos" (1.9–10). Framed by its first and last similes, which suggest the devils are the unreliable figments of human tales, book 1 plays on perspective and size by reviewing, along with Satan, their "stature" and "number." After insisting on their gigantism, the similes, in order to count them, shrink the almost innumerable devils into infinitesimal units to make them fit into the human mind, no less than they themselves voluntarily shrink to enter their new home Pandaemonium. The profane temple Pandaemonium, raised by music that is hard to distinguish from the music of Milton's own verses, is a first idolatrous counterimage of the poetic edifice that will be *Paradise Lost*. Its fallen architect Mulciber is the poet's uncomfortably close double. The chief devils described in the catalog that occupies the center of book 1 and organizes its poetic figures and symbolic geography—Carthage, Sodom, Egypt, Babel-Babylon, Rome—are precisely those who will come to inhabit the pagan shrines that human idolatry will build next to or even inside the Jerusalem temple, profaning God's house. If not merely the products of the human imagination, the demons take on the face and names that the imagination has granted them. This catalog—whose traditional epic function is to size up military force—instead suggests the force of spiritual falsehood, and it corresponds to the defeated
devils’ own reluctance to pursue another direct war against God; they would rather resort to satanic fraud. Milton not-so-gently mocks their military posturing, which is going nowhere except to build their council hall in which to sit and talk, and the contrast to earlier epic appears to diminish the devils, much as does their shrinking themselves at the book’s end. But the switch from swords to words, from open force to lies, may make them more dangerous, not less, to their human victims.

In book 2, Milton continues this story of the demilitarization of the fallen angels and of his epic more generally when he bases all of its action around the figure of Ulysses, the hero of eloquence and fraud, whose own epic comes in the aftermath of the Trojan War. Chapter 2 demonstrates that the Odyssey, imitated and parodied in Satan’s voyage through Chaos to God’s newly created universe in the book’s last section, is just one of the classical stories about the career of Ulysses that Milton evokes as models for its different episodes. The various parts of book 2 are held together by this pattern of allusion, as well as by the Odyssean figures of Scylla and Charybdis, the emblem of bad choices, or of loss of choice itself. Unable to die, the devils have no real option but to experience the second death of endless remorse. Here the Doloneia, that unheroic, even spurious episode of the Iliad, in which volunteers are sought to go on spy errands from both Greek and Trojan camps, provides a central model in Paradise Lost, not only the model for Satan’s mission but for the Son’s subsequent offer to save humanity through his future incarnation and death. Thus, Milton’s epic inverts the idea of heroism itself. The hell constructed by the devils—what civilization looks like in the absence of God—is matched in book 2 by the Chaos through which Satan travels. This is a nature from which God has withdrawn his creative hand.

The next two complementary chapters turn to the confrontation of Milton’s poetry with cosmology in a century where earlier models of the universe had been exploded by a new science and astronomy. Chapter 3 shows how, through a complicated chain of intermediary texts, the depiction of Satan’s fall through Chaos in book 2, which invokes the myth of Icarus, and the Son’s successful ride in the paternal chariot of God at the end of the War in Heaven in book 6, which rewrites the story of Phaethon, both trace back to the De rerum natura of Lucretius. They counter the Roman poet’s depiction of an Epicurean cosmos ordered by chance and in a constant state of falling through an infinite void—the “vast vacuity” of Chaos. Through allusion kept beneath the surface of the poem, I suggest, Milton here faces his own deepest skepticism. The myths of these highfliers who fall are further countered in Paradise Lost by the motif of poetic flight. The shaping power of poetry itself and the epic high style counteract the specter of a universe without bound and dimension, or of the shapelessness of Death (“If shape it might be called that shape had none”). Poetry raises the poet over his fallen human condition, the sinking feeling of a Serbonian bog or slough of despond.
To the hell and Chaos of book 2, book 3 opposes God’s heaven and his new creation, the ordered universe, apparently presided over by the sun. But where the first two books describe their infernal realms by a kind of science fiction comparison to fallen human experience—here the epic tradition provided Milton with handy models—book 3 sets apart an invisible God and heaven from the visible universe, divine light from sunlight: “light” is the organizing term of the book. In doing so, my fourth chapter argues, book 3 points to a contrast between the internal illumination invoked by the blind poet and an Apollonian solar inspiration that motivates the poetry of paganism (reducible to the worship of a godless nature). It aligns the poet’s opening prayer for light with the Son’s faith that he will not be left in the dark of the loathsome grave when he offers to die for humanity. In the episode of the Paradise of Fools, the book further criticizes, with a particular eye toward Catholic practice, the tendency of men and women to read back through analogy from God’s and their own visible works to the invisible Creator, and to confuse the two: it parodies, and admits the impossibility of, the book’s own depiction of heaven. Yet, in distinguishing God’s lower works from God and his heaven, “things invisible to mortal sight,” Milton knows that he risks unlinking creation from Creator altogether, as do the book’s alchemical philosophers, and as Satan does when he later suggests to Eve that the sun, not God, is the power source that gives life, as well as light, to the universe. The work of poetry in an age of astronomical revolution and uncertainty, Milton suggests, is both critical and constructive: to reveal what was too bookish and poetical, all too human—a Baconian Idol of the Theater—in earlier accounts of the cosmos; and to assert, through the model of its own bookishness, the order and divine authorship of the Book of Nature, however difficult that book may be to read and however invisible the author may be.

Chapter 5 applies this question of visibility to the political argument of Paradise Lost by focusing on Satan’s envy, a condition associated with vision and first aroused, according to Raphael’s account to Adam and Eve in book 5, by the sight of the Son elevated to vice-regency in heaven, an alteration in celestial affairs that also initiates the difference of linear time from the sameness of cyclical eternity. Satan’s envy links vision to time, and to the finite goods of this world; at its end, the chapter suggests a scriptural parallel in Wisdom of Solomon 2–3. Satan’s refusal to bow down before what he takes to be a temporal image of God corresponds to the later historical rejection of the incarnate Son by the incredulous and envious Jews—while his adversary, the zealous Abdiel, plays the role of a fearless Nicodemus before the Sanhedrin. Satan further argues backward, from the apparently secondary, temporal status of the Son, to assert that the Father, whom the Son visibly expresses, is equally secondary and a purely temporal power to be opposed by temporal force. In his envy, the devil invents worldly monarchy by misattributing it to God and wanting it for himself, inventing war, too, in the process. Milton ties Satan’s envy to the proverbial
envy of the early modern courtier in a royal court. In his meeting with Gabriel in book 4, where the two begin to fight a private duel, called off, as it happens, by God, Satan represents himself in the role of a feudal magnate, refusing to give up a former warrior existence for the cringing court servility to which he accuses Gabriel and the good angels of having subjected themselves. Loving Christian service and abject courtly servitude may indeed look alike. In the character of Gabriel, who briefly seems to rise to Satan’s bait, Milton comments on how difficult it may be to reconcile aristocratic honor with Christianity. Earthly kingship and the royal-aristocratic social order, Paradise Lost thus suggests (guardedly for the Restoration censor, but nonetheless clearly enough), are incompatible with Christian brotherhood. The political form best suited to achieve brotherhood, Milton maintained in The Readie and Easie Way, is the “proportioned,” that is, relative equality of a republican commonwealth. Michael’s narrative in books 11–12 traces how Cain’s fratricidal envy leads to kingship, which reproduces Satan’s envy and monarchical ambition in human history.

Chapters 6 and 7 turn to the human heroes of the poem, to the Fall in book 9 and its aftermath in book 10. Chapter 6 almost stands apart, and it makes my largest claim. It relates the separate falls of Eve and Adam in book 9, respectively, to deeply held wishes that Milton reveals in other writings throughout his career. The fall of Eve grows out of the desire to make trial of an otherwise cloistered virtue and to stand approved in the eyes of God: individual recognition, which Milton uneasily assimilates with the wish for fame. The model in Paradise Lost is Abdiel, but the zealous angel has good company in the Lady in Comus, the poet-speakers of Lycidas and Mansus, and the hero Jesus, as well as his exemplar Job, in Paradise Regained. Abdiel, the lone dissenter who stands up to the rebel Satan after the latter accuses him of sedition, is a clear autobiographical stand-in for John Milton, and he introduces a distinctly Miltonic third term that complicates the alternatives of power and love that shape the poem’s ethics and generic form: the imperative to prove oneself alone, to use one’s talents like the good servant in the parable, and to receive divine applause: “Servant of God, well done.” Such spiritual aspiration and the individual fame it wins in heaven may appear to be easily distinguished from the fame and renown sought by worldly conquerors and builders of Babels. It is harder to separate from the fame to which the Christian poet Milton aspires—to be equal in renown with Homer—a remainder, perhaps, of the will to power that lurks within piety and zeal.

Satan’s tempting rhetoric to Eve criticizes this wish by turning it into a quest to be the object of universal admiration. Adam, on the other hand, falls in the name of marital love, which the fiction of books 5–8 has made analogous to the communion and joy that Raphael tells Adam and Eve the banqueting angels experience in heaven, and which is reproduced in the meal Raphael shares with them in Eden. This is the sociable joy, the personified Euphrosyne, of L’Allegro
and the unifying charity that builds the church in *Areopagitica*. Adam’s marital (and human) solidarity with Eve cuts him off from the larger community of God and his creatures. Both Eve and Adam have good reasons that go wrong when they disobey God, and their respective wishes—the proof, in Eve’s case, of one’s solitary spiritual worth and sufficiency, the remedying, in Adam’s, of one’s social deficiency through human love and companionship—survive and are ratified after the Fall when the couple appear to have switched positions. Adam at the poem’s end asserts his vertical dependence on the only God, while Eve declares her love for and inseparability from Adam. Michael’s supplement to Adam’s profession of creed, enjoining him to add charity, seems to announce a new Christian liberty that aligns the poem’s ending with Eve (who indeed gets its last word) and with the relationship of human marriage.

The restoration of the marriage of Adam and Eve in book 10, after their fall and mutual recriminations in book 9, is the dramatic climax of *Paradise Lost*, the event that brings them back both to each other and to God. Chapter 7 places this reconciliation of the first couple against the preceding first two-thirds of book 10, which have described the building by Sin and Death of their bridge over Chaos and Satan’s return to hell. Each of these appears to be a “triumphal act,” allusively associated with the triumph of Augustus depicted on the shield of Aeneas in *Aeneid* 8, the chronological “ending” of Virgil’s poem. But allusion equally returns both demonic acts to the beginning of the *Aeneid*, the storm and shipwreck off of Carthage, and suggests the recursive shape of evil in the larger book 10, a book in which the narrative sequence of events seems to run in a loop. So these satanic acts of heroism are now understood as mock-triumphs that parody the real triumphs of the Son, true endings that foreshadow apocalyptic ones, at the respective ends of books 6 and 7. When the divine change of the earth’s weather unleashes storm winds that match the turmoil of the despairing Adam, he, too, seems to have been returned to the landscape, outward and internal, of the opening scene of *Aeneid* 1. Book 10 places the reconciliation of Adam and Eve, the modest but true heroism of *Paradise Lost* that ensures a future for humanity, against the grand enterprises of the devils and of earlier epics—the *Aeneid’s* epic of Roman power in particular—that ultimately go nowhere. Satan is left behind in book 10 and out of Milton’s poem, last seen in the same abject posture he was in at its opening. Eve raises Adam out of his despair, and he returns the favor, arguing Eve out of the course of suicide. But Eve’s realization that she and Adam can opt to die restores choice to the human couple, one denied to the deathless fallen angels of book 2. Adam and Eve choose to live by choosing love.

Eve initiates their spiritual recovery, and in book 10 seems more sympathetic than her desperate husband, who exposes her at the Judgment Scene and bursts out into a rant against women when she first approaches him. Milton’s celebration of marriage entails the rehabilitation of Eve as character and as representative woman, mother of mankind. The book rewrites other misogynistic
myths and stories—Virgil’s Dido, Pandora, and the concubine of Gibeah in Judges—in a systematic pattern of allusion that parallels and contributes to the countering of its own misogynistic biblical myth. These allusions, too, hint at not-so-concealed autobiography underlying Milton’s depiction of the first human marriage.

A short coda to the book, chapter 8 examines the structure of the composite books 11 and 12, once the final book 10 of the 1667 edition, in which the prophesied destruction of Eden corresponds, antithetically, to the building of Pandæmonium at the beginning of Paradise Lost in book 1. After the Fall, Eden might become a temple, oracle site, a grove of pagan rites, goal of pilgrimage—it has already, at the moment that Satan invades it in book 4, been compared to the sheepfold of the Church, prey to thieves, a Church too rich to escape corruption. In books that predict the rise of empires, God dissociates his cult from power and wealth, closing down and eventually washing away Eden, lest it become another Pandæmonium, a haunt of foul spirits. Milton similarly closes down Paradise Lost, and the imaginative wealth of the epic tradition housed inside it, to exclude poetic successors. He turns against his own poetry the iconoclasm directed at Mulciber’s idolatry; Adam’s visions themselves cease shortly after Michael has predicted the Flood sweeping Paradise off its foundations.

Look for Eden now and you will only find living human temples containing a paradise within.

By the end of Paradise Lost, the prospect of an up-to-date globe from the Mountain of Speculation shows the earth overrun by rising and falling empires and by kings, whether they go by the name of king, khan, czar, sultan, or negus. Human power has triumphed, and, beginning with Nimrod at Babel, it has reduced language and meaning to noise, to the “din” also shared by Satan’s troops (first clashing swords against shields in hell, later hissing when they have been transformed into serpents), by the violence of the War in Heaven, and by the deafening roar of Chaos itself (12.61; 1.668; 10.521; 6.408; 2.1040). The same barbarous dissonance threatens to drown out the song of the poet-speaker, born perhaps into an age too late for poetry itself. He is surrounded, to transfer the terms that Satan will use in Paradise Regained, by a world that is all too “real” rather than “allegoric.” The light of the sun seen through Galileo’s telescope and the poem’s verses is the harbinger of an enlightenment that consigns Adam, Eve, and Eden—and perhaps the grand narrative of Milton’s religion itself—to “fables old.” All of this is acknowledged by Paradise Lost. The epic already participates in a skeptical modernity.

Milton’s new poem looks back on these old fables, however, not only with nostalgia but with hope. Its blind poet asserts that there is more to this finite “real” than the visible from which he is in any event excluded, and he provides the supplement of inner light and imagination. His poem’s center, the defeat of Satan and the creation of a new heaven and earth, took place at the beginning
of history, was repeated spiritually at the Incarnation, and will occur again at the apocalyptic end, giving God himself a chance at a do-over, to improve what he tried before. God may be biding his time, but humans, the poem tells us, can always start over, and the last lines show Adam and Eve with the world all before them. They carry with them the knowledge of Eden, of *Paradise Lost* itself, an Eden that is now for them as for us as much a recreation of the imagination as of memory, and they have learned that love is better than power. The world, Milton's great poem and all the fables of literature teach, need not be known to us, nor left by us, quite as it was given.