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Milton's Vocal Hierarchy in Paradise Lost

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by

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ABSTRACT

Despite the important work that has been done on both the narrative voice and the interplay between the characters' voices in *Paradise Lost*, the thematic importance of the way in which the physical, audible voices of the various characters exist within the poem has not been explored. My thesis fills this critical void, focusing on the audible voices of God, the Son, Satan, Adam, and Eve to address the poem's hierarchy: God as absolute ruler, the Son as viceroy, Satan as insurgent, and Adam and Eve as potential residents of Heaven pending their exercise of free will. I argue that, in choosing audible voice as a vital physical manifestation of the heavenly and hellish hierarchies, Milton elevates voice as one of his epic's enduring features.

INDEX WORDS: Paradise Lost, John Milton, Voice, God, The Son, Satan, Adam and Eve

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DEDICATION

This manuscript is dedicated to my parents, Jane and Alan, who helped keep me going when I felt like quitting.

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1 INTRODUCTION AND CRITICAL CONTEXT

By 1652, aged 43, John Milton was completely blind. Writing in 1654 to his friend, the scholar Leonardos Philaras, Milton described how “the darkness perpetually before [my eyes], as well during the night as in the day, seems always approaching rather to white than to black, admitting, as the eye rolls, a minute portion of light as through a crevice” (*Familiar Letters,* 69). This condition—which historians and doctors have variously diagnosed as glaucoma (Aronson; Wilmer); retinal detachement (Sorsby; Hertzberg); or, most convincingly, a pituitary tumor that put pressure on the optic nerve (Rumrich, “Cause”)—left Milton dependent on those around him for the dictation of his writings, most prominently his masterpiece, *Paradise Lost*. John Aubrey, author of *Brief Lives,* relates how Milton began composing *Paradise Lost* in 1658 after already having spent years in near-total darkness, relying on his daughters, friends, and amanuenses to write down what he had composed and memorized in his head the night before (66). The parallels to the apocryphal stories of Homer’s blindness have intrigued readers for centuries; rather than write *Paradise Lost*, Milton spoke it, echoing the oral tradition of the ancient Greeks. It is fitting, then, that many scholars have focused on the concepts of orality, sound, and voice when approaching the poem.

Perhaps most notably, C. S. Lewis in *A Preface to “Paradise Lost”* (1942) declared that "all poetry is oral, delivered by the voice . . . musical" (13), a sentiment with which most subsequent Milton critics have agreed. For Lewis, Milton’s poem is especially dependent on the sound of its words, and in the midst of framing *Paradise Lost* as a development and continuation of the author’s classical forebearers, Homer and Virgil, Lewis emphasizes that the "sound and manner" of the poem ought to absorb the reader to such an extent that the act of reading becomes a "rite" of concentration (61). Lewis's contemporary, T. S. Eliot, offered a similar view in *On*

Poetry and Poets (1943), singling out *Paradise Lost* as uniquely euphonious and praising Milton's "ability to work in larger musical units than any other poet" (158).

A decade afterwards, Joseph H. Summers focused on the physical sound of Milton's verse, examining how the poet employs meter, caesura, and repetition in *Paradise Lost* to create a structure of sound upon which the "central relationships" of the epic's characters are built (1089). Echoing Lewis and Eliot, Summers sees Milton as a poet who operates primarily through the "sensuous medium of sound" and who encourages the reader to recite the poem aloud to capture the words' full voluptuousness (1084). More recently, Angelica Duran has called attention to the unusually profound effect that oral readings of *Paradise Lost* continue to have on a wide variety of audiences. Duran asserts that Milton's "oral production is distinct from any full recitation of a preexisting poem" and that whether read aloud to a young Mary Shelly, or heard aloud by millennials in the form of tapes, CDs, audiobooks, or even computer-generated voices, the poem's aural effect still today makes deep impressions on listeners (272).

Focusing on the materiality of these aural effects, Beverly Sherry has argued that "sound . . . for Milton . . . is unmistakably corporeal," another manifestation of the poet's animist materialism (224). Milton believed that everything in the cosmos is physical, including the "universal hubbub" of sound itself in Chaos (2.951). Seth Herbst has developed Sherry's discussion of Milton's materialism, bringing it full-circle, back to the music of Lewis and Eliot. According to Herbst, "To read Milton's epic is to be confronted with the powerful sense that music participates in a chain of material being" (37). He highlights music—which, he notes, is a "physical, material object" in the poem—as a phenomenon that enables Milton to reconcile two opposed entities, the body and the soul, within his monist philosophy (42).

But if the theme of sound in *Paradise Lost* reverberates through decades of Milton criticism—spanning New Critics such as Eliot to contemporary phenomenological-historicist critics such as Herbst—relatively little attention has been given to the sound of *Paradise Lost's* narrative voice. Lewis himself refers briefly to the "great unflagging voice" of the poem's narrator, but it was not until Anne Ferry, more than twenty years later in *Milton's Epic Voice: The Narrator in "Paradise Lost"* (1963), that critics began to appreciate how the narrative voice pervades the poem (45). Anticipating Sherry and Herbst's work on the physical nature of sound for Milton, Ferry analyzes the narrator's diction and syntax, along with the structure of the poem itself, to arrive at the conclusion that Milton had to create a narrator who can depict the prelapsarian world without the contamination of sin. Ferry maintains that this narrative voice acts as an aural bridge between fallen and unfallen creation. Foreseeing the work of yet another critic, John Shawcross, Ferry also asserts that this narrative voice directly unites readers to Adam and Eve's humanity, and invites us to share not only in the tragedy of Adam and Eve's downfall, but also in their duty to choose good over evil in a fallen world.

John E. Seaman in *The Mortal Paradox of "Paradise Lost"* (1971) developed Ferry's ideas about the vocality of the epic's narrator, although he was less interested in interrogating the source of the narrator's voice, preferring instead to conflate this voice with Milton's. Seaman examines the hierarchy of the poem's characters and the ways in which the narrator erects this hierarchy based on the characters' actions. Seaman's analysis of the verbal contrast between the two heavenly councils in book 2—boisterous in Hell and mostly silent in Heaven—anticipates a larger point dealing with a hierarchy of voice that I will expand on in my thesis (84).

A decade later in *With Mortal Voice: The Creation of "Paradise Lost"* (1982), John Shawcross re-centralized the epic's narrative voice, downplaying Seaman's concern with

character and returning to Ferry's focus on the function of the actual voice telling Milton's story. For Shawcross, though, unlike Ferry, the poem's narrative voice is decidedly human and imperfect, yet emblematic of a central, didactic message: that by the grace of God, and the wise exercise of free will, something flawed can be triumphant. Shawcross identifies this message, which he holds as the poem's main thesis, with the humanized narrative voice (21).

In the ensuing decade, Stanley Fish combined the attentions of Ferry, Seaman, and Shawcross and addressed both the characters' spoken words and Milton's four invocations to the Muse. Fish asserts that "there seems to be no end of this jockeying for verbal power" between the various characters and Milton himself (522). He insists, however, that Milton ultimately fails in his goal, elucidated in *An Apology for Smectymnuus* (1642), of "[conceiving himself] to be now not as mine own person," of completely separating himself as a mortal human from the narrator's voice, as Ferry claimed he did (284). Moreover, Fish holds that Milton actually wanted to fail in his goal, since he was aware, consciously or not, that the success of his narrative voice hinges on being spoken "in exile," that is, by one who lives in a fallen world (525). The same year (1995) that Fish made these conjectures, Louis L. Martz was likewise examining Milton's narrative voice in *Paradise Lost*, although Martz chose to focus more narrowly on the manner in which the voice changes in the epic's first four books. Martz identifies these tonal shifts in the narrator's voice with the "traditional prophetic strategy" that ultimately "promises redemption" (15).

The next year Elizabeth Sauer published *Barbarous Dissonance and Images of Voice in Milton's Epics* (1996), in which she returned the discussion of *Paradise Lost*'s narrative voice to the power struggles elucidated by Fish. A central theme of Sauer's book is Milton's dialogic imagination or "multivocality" and the way he undermines the narrator's apparently omniscient

voice with the voices emanating from the poem's various other characters. Sauer maintains that the epic's muddled, vocal authority was part of a broader attempt by Milton to pry open the restricted spaces of discourse and interrogate the dominant power structures in contemporary England.

At the turn of the millennium, Sherry published an account of a live reading of Milton's poem in New Zealand that seemed to support Sauer's thesis: Sherry describes how the poem's "multivocality" quickly became clear during the spoken performance. Emphasizing the complicated struggle between the poem's narrative voice and the voices of its characters, Sherry echoed Lewis and Eliot's early work, observing how "the sensuous fabric of *Paradise Lost* is rendered vocally" and comparing the narrative voice and the characters' voices to strands of fiber that weave above and below each other (129).

Taking a different, historical approach, Anthony Welch has examined how poets during the British Civil Wars "worked to redefine the role of epic poetry as the public voice of its community" (573). Welch mainly focuses on William Davenant's *Gondibert* (1651), but in the final section of his article, he describes how Milton reflects Davenant's epic formula in *Paradise Lost* through Satan, initially an epic general of external action in hell, who turns inward and becomes a romance figure of private contemplation in the *locus amoenus* of Earthly paradise. Welch argues that Satan's private recesses, which create history itself, and Adam and Eve's domestic love, which creates humanity, echo both Davenant's elevation of private thoughts to the promise of political action and his focus on familial bonds. These are, according to Welch, the epic's two sustaining forces. In this way, he relegates the role of Milton's narrative voice to secondary importance behind not only Satan's private lamentations but also Adam and Eve's professed love for one another.

Most recently, Maura Josephine Smyth has delved into the gender implications of Milton's use of narrative voice, which she claims "[inverts the] gender hierarchy though a reversal of narrative order," thereby providing Eve with a specific power over language—and therefore a "voice"—that Adam lacks (138). Smyth focuses on the “voice” or “vocalized language” that draws Eve away from her reflection, and she ultimately concludes that Eve is not the product of the poem's narrative voice, but rather is a character who "writes herself" (in other words, speaks herself) into seventeenth-century society (151). Around the same time, Stephen Hequembourg was contending with the already-discussed polemics of Fish, Shawcross, and Ferry regarding the narrator's voice. He argues in the spirit of Ferry that Milton's voice "cannot finally be identified either with his lovely enchanting language or with those pure scriptural words that he wishes he could repeat, simply and selflessly” (178). The narrator of the epic is, therefore, an artificial creation and remains difficult to characterize. Acknowledging that "so much of the poem is spoken by its characters" (154), he concludes, like Fish and Ferry before him, that Milton is "pulled back and forth" between narrative voice and character voice, somehow achieving aesthetic splendor in the midst of the battle.

Finally, hearkening back to Lewis and Eliot’s emphasis on Milton’s musicality, Katherine Cox has explored the intricacies of sound and speech in the voices of both the narrator and the poem’s characters. Cox focuses in particular on Satan's sounds and the production of the serpent's voice as an effect of Satan's "meteorological agency," or his "similarity to wind and the pneumatic ingredient in metals" (250). She ultimately echoes Shawcross's view that Milton had a verbally didactic purpose in crafting *Paradise Lost*: he wished for his readers to be "recreated by its sound" (254).

As this survey illustrates, critics have long been contending with the concept of "narrative voice" in Milton's epic, just as they have highlighted, more generally, the importance of sound in the poem. The enthusiasm for Milton's narrative voice is understandable: confronting such a detailed and dizzying narrative, and the intensity of characters' competing energies, readers naturally turn to the august voice, synonymous or not with Milton himself, that presides over the poem. This voice serves as a beacon which readers look to and depend on for guidance and clarity as they navigate the challenging and complex work.

Despite the valuable scholarship that has been done on both *Paradise Lost's* narrative voice and the interplay between the poems' voices, the thematic importance of the characters' physical, audible voices has not yet been explored. By "audible voices," I refer to dialogue that can be heard, which modernizing editors typically mark within quotation marks. This kind of voice often describes dialogue between characters, but I also include dialogue when characters speak to themselves with audible sound. For example, Satan begins his monologue in book 4 with "sighs," suggesting that his following speech is at least in part audible (4.31).

Virtually every scholar who has written on *Paradise Lost* has discussed the characters' voices and the way they interact with each other—how they inform each other, fight each other, support each other, counsel each other, and so on. Critics also, of course, continue to analyze at length the specific ideas and words that the characters speak to one another. But nowhere have I seen an in-depth examination of the significance of the actual, audible, physical reality of the voices that pervade the poem.

The scholarly neglect of these audible voices seems extraordinary, particularly since Milton employs audible voice—and the resulting reactions of the characters—as the poem's most important plot device. Satan's voice rallies the fallen angels; the devilish council in book 2

consists almost entirely of demonic voices, and upon agreement, they shout; God's voice proclaims the Son's triumph over Death, and the heavenly host also shouts; a voice saves Eve from Narcissus's fate; a voice squirms its way into Eve's consciousness and generates her dream, tempting her to sin; Raphael's angelic voice dominates books 5, 6, 7, and 8; Satan enters the serpent through his mouth and by his art attains human voice, which he then uses to tempt Eve to sin; Adam and Eve, upon sinning, flee the sound of the Son's voice, which has become dreadful to them; Michael's angelic voice acts as both the audible conveyor of God's command of expulsion from Eden and the instructor of the future to the beleaguered Adam; and, in what I will describe as the poem's climax, Adam and Eve lift their voices up to God in a genuinely contrite plea for forgiveness. Nearly every major plot point in *Paradise Lost* involves some type of audible voice, and even the aspects of the plot that are more action-oriented (such as the war in Heaven and the creation of the Earth) are not related directly by Milton the narrator, but rather by the voice of Raphael. God's exaltation of the Son in book 5, which motivates Satan's original rebellion, again reinforces the special status of verbal expression. God's demand for all of Heaven to "hear [his] decree" recalls the biblical idea of the Son as God's "word" (John 1:14) and erects the poem's foundation upon an audible proclamation (5.602).[1]

It is no accident that Milton gives such prominence to the power of the audible voice. Despite the narrator's four invocations and the self-reflection in these proems that propel the poem forward, the vast majority of *Paradise Lost's* narrative emanates not from the narrator, and not from action, but rather from the audible voices of its characters. It is a poem that depends on a series of conversations and speeches. What is Milton's purpose in granting such privilege to these voices?

[1] All quotations from the Bible are taken from the Authorized (King James) Version.

My thesis will focus on the audible voices of five specific characters in *Paradise Lost*: God, the Son, Satan, Adam, and Eve. A fuller consideration of the thematic importance of audible voice would include an analysis of the angelic voices of Raphael, Michael, Uriel, and Gabriel, the demonic voices of Beelzebub, Moloch, Mammon, and Belial, and the voices of Sin and Death. However, I have chosen to focus on the above five because, from a standpoint of power, they are the crucial characters in Heaven, Hell, and Paradise, respectively. My discussion will reveal how Milton uses audible voices as an essential tool of characterization that distinguishes each figure's idiosyncratic authority. I will examine how the characters speak, the effect of audible speech on listeners, and the peculiar effect each voice evinces in order to address the poem's hierarchy: God as absolute ruler, the Son as viceroy, Satan as insurgent, and Adam and Eve as potential residents of Heaven pending their exercise of free will. While this power dynamic can hardly surprise readers of *Paradise Lost*, Milton's use of audible voices to express the epic's broader structure is significant: the spoken word emerges as a crucial vehicle for depicting God's authority, the Son's heroism, Satan's pride, and Adam and Eve's prelapsarian purity, tragic sin, and postlapsarian hope in the midst of despair. And so, in choosing audible voice as a vital physical manifestation of the heavenly and hellish hierarchies, Milton elevates voice as one of his epic's enduring features.

2 GOD'S VOICE

The Oxford English Dictionary contains a specific definition of the noun "voice" that provides a useful foundation for discussing God in *Paradise Lost*. In addition to the more conventional definition of *voice* as "sound produced by and characteristic of a specific person or animal," the word can specifically be used "In biblical translations and allusions with reference to a divine voice. Chiefly in the voice of God (also heaven, Christ, etc.): the expressed will or desire of God, heaven, etc.; divine command, ordinance, or word" (*OED*). In this latter sense, God's voice is not in itself a means of conveying will; his voice and his will are one and the same. The physical aspects of God (including a voice that can be heard by others) exist in a permanent, indivisible bond with the metaphysical (God's will). Maura Josephine Smyth highlights this union when she observes that before Eve meets Adam, "she does not even know that there is a God, only that there is a Voice" (142). Milton's invocation to light in book 3 likewise echoes this indistinguishability between God's will and God's voice:

> Before the sun,
> Before the heavens thou wert, and at the voice
> Of God, as with a mantle didst invest
> The rising world of waters dark and deep,
> Won from the void and formless infinite. (3.8-12)

In the lines that precede this passage, Milton echoes 1 Timothy 6:16, declaring that "God is light, / And never but in unapproched light" (3.3-4), which flows out of God in "Bright effluence" (3.6). But then Milton asks light whether it would prefer to be called "pure ethereal

stream" (3.7), a reference to ether, the lightest of the five elements, the stuff of stars and planets. In both senses, light itself responds to God's voice immediately and illuminates the primeval Earth. But in the latter sense, Milton personifies light as an independent agent obedient to God's voice, and by extension his will. All God has to do is speak, and reality will align itself with the will of his word.

The essence of God's voice as proclamation of his will has biblical precedent that Milton undoubtedly wished to echo. Genesis opens with God's simple pronouncement "Let there be light," and light itself obeys God's voice (Gen. 1.3). Milton's God carries on this tradition of imperative speech; aside from his explanations of free will (3.16-119), almost everything he says is a proclamation. He employs other methods of communicating, such as using his angels as emissaries and the sign he places in the sky at the end of book 4, but his audible voice remains his primary means of expression. His first words in the epic are prophetic, when he calls the Son's attention to Satan's activities and the way that the devil is "so bent he seems / On desperate revenge, that shall redound / Upon his own rebellious head" (3.84-86). Omniscient and omnipotent, God has no reason to say anything that is not already so or will not come to pass. He exists outside of time, but from the standpoint of those within time, his voice creates reality. Inextricably binding his voice and his will with fate itself, he commands the Son, whom he repeatedly refers to as his "Word," to

> speak thou, and be it done:
>
> . . .
>
> . . . ride forth, and bid the deep
>
> Within appointed bounds be heav'n and earth;

Boundless the deep, because I am who fill
Infinitude, nor vacuous the space.
Though I uncircumscribed myself retire,
And put not forth my goodness, which is free
To act or not, necessity and chance
Approach not me, and what I will is fate. (7.164-73)

The Son physically performs the act of speaking the world into creation, just as he physically descends to speak judgment on Adam and Eve after their sin, but only by the will of God. God's audible voice conveys the command of creation to the Son, which is the same as saying that he wills the Earth into existence by his verbal infusion of divine authority into the Son. God speaks these actual words to the Son, and his act of speaking is synonymous with his will, a will that does not merely predict or pronounce fate, but that is fate itself.[2]

This powerful and unassailably elementary nature of God's voice again echoes biblical sources, this time the opening of the Gospel of John: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be" (1.1-3). This passage recalls Milton's invocation to light, as he declares that "God is light, / And never but in unapprochéd light / Dwelt from eternity" (3.3-5). Milton's substitution of "light" for "the Word" implies that his God does not merely pronounce commands, but that his commands are in and of themselves illuminative essences that reveal realities in the same breath as they are created. In this way,

[2] "Fate" here is distinct from "predestination," a doctrine which Milton rejected. He clarifies this point in book 3, when God describes how Adam and Eve cannot "justly accuse / Their Maker, or their making, or their fate, / As if predestination overruled / Their will" (3.112-115). God created Adam and Eve free (3.124) and he emphasizes that his foreknowledge of their sin "had no influence on their fault" (3.118).

Milton distinguishes his unmistakably monarchical God from any other type of magistrate, worldly or otherwise. Other pretending rulers speak, and the elements react to their words. Satan, as we shall see, uses his voice variously to rally, to manipulate, to tempt, and to scorn, and despite its effectiveness, his voice has no power to accomplish anything but reactions from other physical entities. God's supreme voice, in contrast, creates physical entities. Through the Son, he speaks the world into existence, and Raphael describes how no time passes between God's commanded word and reality's reaction. "Immediate are the acts of God," he declares, "more swift / Than time or motion," though the angel takes care to mention to Adam that there are physical limitations to "human ears" that necessitate a means of translation (7.176-77). Raphael then identifies the "process of speech" (7.178) as the primary way that humans receive the "acts of God," so, from a human perspective, "God's voice" is a translation of "God's will" or "God's acts," instantly infusing reality absent human physical limitations. In this sense, God's audible voice (from the perspective of humans) is distinct from God's "omnific Word" that transfigures Choas into Creation: God's audible voice is the essence of his word filtered through the physical ears of the human body, translated into sounds that humans can understand. God's "omnific Word," however, embodied in the Son, speaks to that which cannot be heard in any human sense (the "troubled waves" of the "abyss"), which nonetheless obeys (7.211, 216-217). John Rumrich has suggested that Chaos itself is "God's womb, essential to his deity" ("Milton's God," 1043), with God's "sovereignty and creative power" (1044) dependent on Chaos, an expression of a hermaphroditic deity that is at once the feminine infinitude of space and the masculine filler of that space. Indeed, the significance of Creation in book 7 depends on the reception of God's "omnific" voice by the abyss, or Chaos. Raphael implies that humans cannot hear or comprehend this "omnific" voice without translation into speech, but Chaos needs no such translation and

"heard his [God's] voice" immediately (7.221). Milton thus depicts God's voice as an entity protean in form, if not in substance—whether speaking to the Son, to the assembled angels, to Chaos, or to human beings, the full substance of his voice comes through, tempered on the receiving end by the physical limitations of the hearer.

Even before humans are alive to hear God's voice, he speaks the words "Let us make now man in our image" and then wordlessly "in [Adam's] nostrils [breathes] / the breath of life" (7.519, 525-26). Adam's creation is special, as it involves a potential double dose of God's voice, first in the form of actual authoritative words, and then in the form of a wordless, yet possibly audible breath. Whether this breath comes through God's mouth or nose is unclear, although in either case an audible exhalation would invite intriguing parallels. A wordless expression of God's voice that literally breathes the first human soul into existence would be prophetic, just like God's actual words: God exhales into Adam, anticipating how all human breasts will rise and fall in a cadence of breathing life that recalls God's first breath into Adam.

The breath of life into Adam is the climax of earthly creation, and such a climax bespeaks God's endlessly comprehensive nature. His voice dramatically penetrates "Far into Chaos, and the world unborn; / For Chaos heard his voice: Him all his train / Followed in bright procession, to behold / Creation, and the wonders of his might," as he speaks creation into existence (7.220-23). And yet, in the moment of his most exquisite creative triumph, God's voice does not mightily pronounce anything at all, but rather discharges quietly the divine essence that creates the human soul. We will see this specifically quiet, although possibly audible power of God's voice reflected in the Son.

God's voice exhausts all attempts to encompass it because, once again alluding to the opening of the Gospel of John and God's own words in book 7, the divine voice and the divine

will are one and the same, and they together blend seamlessly with fate. The opening to John underlines the absolute authority of Milton's God because the use of "word" contains a dual meaning that helps to explain the dual nature of God's essence. On the one hand, "word" (Greek *logos*) implies a dynamic creativity that recalls the voice of Milton's God and the God in Genesis, both of who actively speak creation into being. On the other hand, "word" also points to an eternal wisdom that has always existed and will always exist. The Gospel of John uses the dual meaning of "word," both dynamically as "a divine communication, command, or proclamation," and simply as "the Eternal Word [or will, or voice]" of God in order to present God as the arbiter of reality (*OED*).

Milton follows John closely in characterizing God, and one of Milton's bluntest displays of God is in book 5, when Raphael relates God's decree of the Son. In a short speech spanning only sixteen lines, God exalts the Son to Heaven, declaring that "your head I him appoint" (5.606), that all of Heaven "shall confess him Lord" (5.608), and that

> him who disobeys
> Me disobeys, breaks union, and that day
> Cast out from God and blessed vision, falls
> Into utter darkness, deep engulfed, his place
> Ordained without redemption, without end. (5.611-15)

God's speech is striking in two ways: first, these 16 lines, a mere blip in an epic that spans over ten thousand verses, inspire every event that happens in the poem—God's simple speech moves Satan to sin, and with Satan the other rebel angels and all of humanity. The

bluntness of God's words has compelled critics to variously describe God as "pompous, defensive, and self-righteous" (Bloom 159), "frustrating. . .[and] tyrannical" (Fallon 47), or even "Uncle Joe Stalin (Empson 146). I feel that it is more useful, though, to refrain from attaching worldly monikers to Milton's God, recalling Roland Mushat Frye's contention that everything in *Paradise Lost* is "totally dependent on the sole absoluteness of God" (88-89). Milton's God is the original sovereign, and so he should not be negatively viewed in terms of worldly tyrants. The tyrants themselves—chiefly Satan, but indeed, worldly monarchs as well—are pretenders to God's absolute authority.[3] And so in crafting such a curt speech for God that catalyzes the war in Heaven, the creation of our cosmos, the fall of humankind, human history, and the final apocalypse, Milton emphasizes this central theme concerning the voice of God: its authority is absolute, and while obedience might be difficult, its message is simple.

The second way that God's voice in this scene carries so much weight is that his pronouncement is apparently arbitrary. There is no lead-up to what he says, no hint of any preparation, and no attempt to ease the heavenly hosts into the new state of affairs. God simply speaks, and he expects unconditional obedience. In this sense, Milton not only equates God's voice with his will and his word, but specifically with his law. God speaks, and God's word is law itself, just as God speaks and his will becomes reality.

When the prelapsarian Adam and Eve hear God's voice, they thus instinctively obey it, as Eve does when a voice warns her "What thou seest, / What there thou seest, fair creature is thyself, / With thee it came and goes: but follow me" (4.467-69). Kristin A. Pruitt describes the voice that calls Eve away from her reflection "divine" (40), a term which seems to leave little

[3] See the preface to *Eikonoklastes*, in which Milton criticizes the iconic status of Charles I's wildly popular book, *Eikon Basilike*. Drawing unfavorable parallels to past worldly rulers, Milton compares the book to the "last will of Caesar" (1062) and bemoans the "exorbitant and excessive" English populace who are "prone oft-times not to a religious only, but to a civil kind of idolatry in idolizing their kings" (1063).

room for ambiguity about its origin. Yet, the narrator asserts that this voice belongs to a "genial angel" (4.712), and in *De Doctrina Christiana*, Milton discusses at length the ambiguities of God's voice vested in the guise of an angel, focusing specifically on Ex. 23:20-21.[4] A "genial angel" could potentially be described as "divine," since the angel is God's emissary. Another possibility is that the voice belongs to the Son, who, at least after the Fall, speaks with God's voice on earth (10.55-57). It is unclear if the Son speaks with this same authority on earth before the Fall, but Milton may have intended this to be the case; he writes in *De Doctrina Christiana*: "the name of God, by the will and granting of God the father, is not infrequently bestowed even on angels, even on humans; how much more, then, on the only-begotten son, the image of the father" (OM 8:1.5.165).

Mary Jo Kietzman (68), however, echoes Pruitt and Douglas Day (370) in presuming that the "disembodied voice" Eve hears at her birth is God's, and I second this opinion, primarily because the voice's words have strong biblical parallels (40). God's voice directing Eve to "follow" him recalls Jesus's exhorting Peter and Andrew to "come after me," in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, and the tax collector Levi to "follow me" in the Gospel of Luke (Mt. 5.19, Mk. 1.17, Lk. 6.27).[5] Like the apostles, Eve follows the voice without hesitation, and Adam himself can apparently hear the voice that softly leads her when he relates to Raphael how "on she came, / Led by her Heav'nly Maker, though unseen, / And guided by his voice" (8.484-86). This voice is what is missing from the watery shape of Eve's reflection that initially fascinates her. God guides her from the lake by providing what she seems to lack, especially in the context

[4] See Vol. VIII of *The Complete Works of John Milton*, ed. John K. Hale and J. Donald Cullington, 1.5.189, hereafter cited parenthetically as OM, by book, chapter, and page numbers.

[5] It might be said that this biblical precedent echoes Jesus' words, not God's specifically, which might be significant in light of Milton's Arianism. However, I will show in "The Son's Voice" that, on earth, after the Fall, God's voice is indistinguishable from the Son's.

of marriage as a conversation. God makes Eve for Adam to join in marriage, and so it is fitting that God gently directs Eve away from solipsism with his voice; she was not made to be solitary and silent. Rather, she was made to complete Adam, with their conversational union that will birth the human race reflecting the "omnific Word" of God's conversation with Chaos that initiated creation. Once again, God's voice is notable for its infinite changeability. In an audible command no human could comprehend, it orders that "discord end" from the deepest Chaos, and yet, when the first woman, freshly-created, innocently "pine[s] with vain desire" (4.466) for her own reflection, the voice gently leads her away from a narcissistic fate and towards her intended companion.

Before the couple sins, this gentle version of God's voice is a guide; Adam recalls God's initial words to him in a dream as emanating from an "inward apparition [who] gently moved / My fancy to believe I yet had being" (8.293-94). Adam also remembers that God speaks to him "mildly," and though his sole commandment is "sternly . . . pronounced" and "resounds / Yet dreadful in mine ear," the harshness in God's voice is short-lived, and "soon his clear aspect / Returned" (8.317, 333-37). Indeed, God's conversation with Adam continues to lighten as Adam recalls God's speaking "with a smile more brightened," "not displeased," and with "gracious voice divine" (8.367, 398, 436). Prelapsarian humanity perceives God's voice with reverence, with awe, and ultimately with pleasure. His voice is law incarnate, and before the Fall, they have no need, and no mind, to view God's voice as anything but wonderful.

However, having sinned, Adam and Eve's reaction to God's voice changes dramatically. God infuses the Son with the power and authority to judge the sinful pair, and "the voice of God they heard / Now walking in the garden . . . they heard, / And from his presence hid themselves among / The thickest trees" (10.97, 99-101). Milton depicts the guilty consciences of Adam and

Eve as they flee the authority of the God's law, just as they chose to break their union with him by disobeying his voice, his law. God, speaking through the Son, specifically chides Adam for disobeying his voice, when he asks, "Was she thy God, that her thou didst obey / Before his voice[?]" (10.145-6). Once again, Milton emphasizes that Adam and Eve disobeyed the audible pronouncement of God's voice, the audible law that was audibly pronounced to auditory human beings who were expected to follow. Their disobedience, foretold by God to the Son in book 3, results in physical alterations to Earth and to the universe, as the "dogs of Hell," Sin and Death enter, to "waste and havoc" the plants and animals of the formerly spotless creation (10.616-17).[6]

Such a world, as punishment for the first sin, must exist under what God refers to as the "curse" (10.640) of Death, and God's commands, delegated to the angels, are reflections of the disorder and strife of Adam and Eve's disobedience. God mandates that the sun change its course "As might affect the Earth with cold and heat / Scarce tolerable," and that the planets move "In sextile, square, and trine, and opposite, / of noxious efficacy," causing winds "to confound / Sea, air, and shore" and "thunder . . . to roll / With terror through the dark aerial hall" (10.653-54, 659-60, 666-67). The dramatic shifts in physical law, both astronomically and terrestrially, are caused by the first sin.[7] Despite these dreadful consequences, however, God does not allow post-

[6] These alterations which follow humanity's first sin do not imply that God is bound by reason, nor do they suggest that God is in any way restricted by the behavior of any in his creation. Rather, such changes to creation are all a part of God's foreknowledge, which has always encompassed the fact that "man will hearken to [Satan's] glozing lies, / And easily transgress the sole command" (3.93-94). As part of this foretold design, God decrees the physical changes in the cosmos and on earth that "[sort] best with present things," namely a world in which his most prized creation, the one to whom he gave dominion over all other living things, has sinned (10.651).

[7] The disruption of the "sea, air, and shore" by tempests recalls the "troubled waves" of Chaos in book 7; it is a striking physical manifestation of how, catalyzed by the first sin, the perfect order of Paradise slides back toward the original, disordered abyss from which God created it (7.216, 10.666). On Earth, "Beast now with beast gan war," and animals "nor stood much in awe / Of man, but fled him, or with count'nance grim / Glared on him passing" (10.710, 712-14). Most of all, however, Adam and Eve's sin allows Death into the world, the most dramatic physical manifestation of the Fall.

lapsarian Creation to descend back into Chaos. His voice has already “won from the void and formless infinite” the form of the world, and though this world is now “polluted” by sin, God decrees that it will be primed for his Son, whom he calls his “sole complacence,” to redeem humankind (3.276). But for now, the command of God's audible voice has been disobeyed, and so the just punishment that ensues from a broken law must reign.

The outcomes of sin would be enough to scare Adam and Eve on their own, but even before they take place, Adam admits that he fears God’s voice specifically (10.116-17). God’s calling voice does not frighten Adam because of its terrible pronouncements—it frightens the first man because in his fallen state he is unable to stand before God naked without shame. His choice to sin has perverted his naked innocence, and he cannot face God because he now has something to hide. God’s rhetorical question in response further twists the knife into Adam’s guilty conscience: “My voice thou oft hast heard, and hast not feared, / But still rejoiced, how is it now become / So dreadful to thee?” (10.119-21). God well knows why his voice is now dreadful to Adam: obeying the divine commandment results in harmonious, natural life, but disobeying upsets the natural order, brings about discord, and ultimately, death. This simple reality of God’s voice as law anticipates Michael’s words to Adam in book 12: “the voice of God / To mortal ear is dreadful” (12.235-36). God’s law is justice, and so the sound of his voice, even when spoken as the “mild Judge” (10.96), resonates horribly in the ears of the sinful, an aural harbinger of death.

3 THE SON'S VOICE

Just as God's voice is synonymous with his will and law, the Son's voice operates as the prime instrument and conveyor of God's will. God proclaims in book 5 that all Heaven "shall confess [the Son] Lord" and that "under his great vicegerent reign abide united / As one individual soul" (5.608-10). God's simple but firm pronouncement is essential to the discussion of the Son's voice because in terms of the narrative, the announcement and exaltation of the Son is one of the poem's first events. As I argued in the previous section, nearly all of *Paradise Lost* follows the Son's anointing, as Satan's envy at the Son's elevation births Sin and, by extension, the rest of the poem's events. There are only two plot points that occur before the Son's anointing, both of which fittingly involve God's voice.[8] The first, related by Abdiel to Satan in book 5, describes to Satan how the Son

> by whom
> As by his Word the mighty Father made
> All things, ev'n thee, and all the Spirits of Heav'n
> By him created in their bright degrees,
> Crowned them with glory, and to their glory named
> Thrones, Dominions, Princedoms, Virtues, Powers. (5.835-40)

The specific connotations of both "begotten" and "Word" in this quotation present the Son as an entity subordinate to and issuing from God, with spoken voice as a crucial connecter between the

[8] In terms of plot, I am exempting Milton's invocation to the "Spirit" in book 1, synonymous with God, that "from the first / Wast present" and fertilized "the vast abyss," and the poet's invocation to light in book 3, again holding the invocation's object, light, as identical to God (1.17, 19-21, 3.3). I count Milton's invocations as poetical prayers.

two distinct celestial entities. For Milton, as he writes in *De Doctrina Christiana*, "begotten" as used in Hebrews 1.5, "Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee," refers only to "the Son's exaltation above the Angels" whom the Son created (OM 8:1.5.131); Milton concludes similarly from Psalm 2.7, "Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee," that "God will be understood to have begotten, that is, created the Son king" (OM 8:1.5.131). As various critics have argued, Milton's heterodox depiction of the Son in *Paradise Lost* could best be characterized as Arian: the Son is not co-eternal, self-existent, or co-essential. John Rumrich notes that even "early readers" already found Arian elements in the epic, long before *De Doctrina Christiana* was published. In the past few decades, Rumrich continues, scholars have affirmed the "consistency of [Arianism's] heretical theology with Milton's poetic fiction" ("Milton's Arianism," 89).

Chronologically, Abdiel's recollection contains the Son's first appearance in *Paradise Lost*, and at this first mention, Milton's Arianism becomes apparent.[9] Abdiel describes the Son as "begotten," a word which the *Oxford English Dictionary* refers to as describing "that which has been produced or generated." Abdiel's describing the Son as "begotten," therefore, implies that the Son's existence required an act by God to generate him, which in turn implies that, at some point in the past, God existed but the Son did not.

Milton confirms this belief in *De Doctrina Christiana*, in which he states that God begot the Son "by his decree, and likewise in time; for the decree must have preceded the decree's execution" (OM 8:1.5.133). God's begetting the Son does not appear in *Paradise Lost*, but

[9] C. S. Lewis thought that "Milton's Arianism is not asserted in *Paradise Lost*" because he takes God's "This day I have begot" to mean "This day I have exalted." Otherwise, Lewis maintains, the "timing is inconsistent with the rest of the poem" (86). But there does appear to be an inconsistency in the poem here regarding time, since it is impossible that God created the Son after the angels, who specifically celebrate the Son as "of all creation first" (3.383). I accept Lewis's interpretation of "begot," but I argue that it does not contradict Milton's Arianism. The word "begotten" occurs three more times in the poem (3.80. 3.384, 5.384), outside of the exaltation in book 5, to describe the Son, and, as will become clear in my discussion, the word carries Arian connotations, despite its use in the Nicene Creed.

Milton specifically refers to the Son as "of all creation first" (3.383). The Son's first action, the creation of the angels, is therefore not the action of an independent agent, but rather of one who is already inextricably tied to God, specifically to his voice. The Son is God's "Word" in two distinct versions: the first, as *logos,* or what the *Oxford English Dictionary* calls a "title of Christ," echoed both in the Gospel of John's description of the Son as "the word . . . made flesh" (1:14) and Revelation, when the Son is described as "the Word of God" (19:13). But the Son is also God's "Word" in the sense of a literal voice: "any of the sequences of one or more sounds or morphemes . . . constituting the basic units of meaningful speech used in forming a sentence or utterance in a language" (*OED*).

In this sense, when Abdiel describes the Son "by whom / As by his Word the mighty Father made / All things," he is saying that the Son is the voice of God himself, a generative voice that creates everything (5.835-37). The phrase "by whom" is crucial here; the Son's act of creation is not spontaneous. It requires an active outside agent, which is God. Milton says as much in *De Doctrina Christiana*, asserting of the Son: "To have glory that was given to him not by himself but by the father because he was loved, even in his divine nature before the world's foundations were laid, clearly indicates a lesser person" (OM 8:1.5.219). In God originates the will, and in the Son this will attains spoken voice. Abdiel therefore describes how the Son "named" the orders of angels (5.839), a verb which implies an audible, spoken decree, which echoes God's "decree" of the Son's begetting in book 5, a decree that God specifically commands the angels to "hear" not once but twice in the span of three lines (5.600, 602). In both senses, the spoken command occurs through God, but in *Paradise Lost*, the Son's "naming" of the angelic orders is directly tied to the generative act of creation one line earlier ("created in

their bright degrees"). The Son's voice becomes the spoken extension of God's will (5.838-39).[10]

Paradise Lost contains almost no passages in which God has not infused the Son with his divine authority, his will, his voice. And indeed, the Son speaks with God's voice throughout the poem, and so completely does God imbue the Son with his voice's authority that Milton does not distinguish between God's voice and the Son's when the Son descends from Heaven to pronounce judgment upon Adam and Eve. The recently fallen pair hear "the voice of God . . . / Now walking in the garden" as the Son approaches, and for the entirety of their interaction Milton refers to the Son's voice and the Son's actions as "God's" (10.97-98, 101). The Son's voice on Earth is indistinguishable from God's by the power of God's will—for it is God himself who asks Heaven "whom send I to judge [Adam and Eve]?" and then immediately answers his own question, "Whom but thee / Vicegerent Son, to thee I have transferred all judgement" (10.55-57). As commentators have long noted, God's total transmission of the authority of law to the Son recalls Jesus's words in the Gospel of Matthew, words Milton seems to foreshadow, "All things have been handed over to me by Father" (Mt. 12.27).

While the heavenly hierarchy may remain hidden from humanity, Milton carefully preserves it in Heaven. When the Son is in Heaven, exempting his orders to the angelic hosts during battle, he does not initiate any conversations; he is always responding to God, whether to ask or to answer questions. Before the Son is heard in book 3, God has already spoken to him about the prophecy of Satan's continued ruin and of humanity's temptation and fall, the doctrine of free will, and the promise of grace. In the Son's first spoken words in the poem, his response

[10] Raphael mentions "th' empyreal host / Of angels by imperial summons called" (5.583-84) to God's throne to witness the Son's presentation. Again, this event involves God's audible voice, commanding the angels to gather for his presentation to them of the Son, his voice in action.

to God's prophesies and doctrines begins with a commendation of God's voice: "O Father, gracious was that word which closed / Thy sov'reign sentence" (3.144-45). Already the Son appears in a secondary role, extoling the goodness of God's pronouncements with audible approval; the Son's first vocalization is to second God. The Son then makes a proclamation of his own, one in which the theme of voice is again central: "both Heav'n and Earth shall high extol / Thy praises, with th' innumerable sound / Of hymns and sacred songs, wherewith thy throne / Encompassed shall resound thee ever blest" (3.146-49). Foretelling the voices of heaven and earth joined in one chorus praising God, the Son describes how these glorifying sounds will designate the hallowed position of God in the heavenly hierarchy.

Crucially, the Son here declares that the united voices will sing the praises of "thee," meaning God, and does not include himself in this category. Unlike God, who refers to "our omnipotence" to describe the union between the Son and himself, the Son never uses the first-person plural when referring to God (5.722). Instead, he always employs the second-person singular "thee" or "thy," indicating that while God often prefers to speak of himself and his Son as the same substance, the Son does not.[11] In this way, the Son echoes Milton's own words in *De Doctrina Christiana*, which clearly state Milton's belief that "the Son is a different person from the Father" (OM 8:1.5.129). And while, presumably, the Son could refer to himself and God as one entity (especially after God esteems his "merit" and commands all Heaven to "adore him" in book 3), his choice to distinguish God vocally from himself is consistent with his humility, a

[11] As God smiles at the brewing rebellion in book 5 and describes his battle strategy to the Son, he uses the first-person plural "our" no fewer than seven times in the span of thirteen lines to variously describe "omnipotence," "throne," "right," "defense," "place," "sanctuary" and hill" (5.719-32). In this way, on the eve before the Battle of Heaven, God takes special care to verbalize the oneness between himself and the Son. This vocalization, implying an infusion of God's majesty into the Son, foreshadows the Son's victory over the rebellious angels, which the Son declares is only possible because God "to me their doom . . . hath assigned" (6.817).

quality which contributes to his decision to volunteer himself for sacrifice, and which earns acclaim from God as "found / By merit more than birthright Son of God" (3.308-09).

The Son achieves this merit, in his crowning moment in book 3, through a specifically voiced declaration, made more conspicuous by the silence of the heavenly hosts. True to the vocal hierarchy, the Son's response, from humanity's standpoint the most significant in the poem, requires God's preempting. When God asks, "Where shall we find such love" to save humanity from Death, Milton describes how, at first, the "Heavenly choir stood mute" (3.213, 217). The angels have no voice to raise in favor of humanity, no will to sacrifice themselves to Death for the sake of a species that will disobey God. But then the Son's voice fills the silence that would have resulted in God's sentencing humankind "to death and Hell by doom severe" (3.223-24). The Son's voice becomes the primary intercessor to God for humanity, and only after the Son raises his voice does God give him dominion over all of Heaven (3.320). This chain of events indicates that the Son did not previously have such authority but earned it through his goodness. In this way, by depicting the Son verbally volunteering himself for Death, Milton concocts a new meaning of "voice" in the epic's vocal hierarchy.[12] The Son's voice is an auditory expression of his will that "man shall find grace," but the Son's will here is distinct from God's, which, as God has earlier declared, is synonymous with fate (3.227, 7.173). Here, the Son's will has no such power of instantaneous generation—he appears to be bound by time. He must first hear God's question, then speak up and volunteer himself for Death. The Son's voice answers, and while it singles him out in the heavenly hierarchy as "beyond compare" in

[12] Milton was not bound by biblical precedent to dramatize the scene in which the Son volunteers himself for death; he completely invents the situation. His choice to write such a scene underscores his aim to create a vocal hierarchy, since vocal expressions (or lack thereof) are the primary characterizing forces here.

relation to the angels, its need of God's preemption illustrates its secondary place in the hierarchy (3.138).

Curiously, the Son's response to God's question in the midst of a silent Heaven recalls Satan's response, in the midst of a silent Hell, to his own question about who in Hell's legions will brave the void and risk "utter loss of being" to search out the newly-created Earth (2.440). In response to Satan's question, "all sat mute," and once again, Milton employs silence in order to distinguish aspects of his vocal hierarchy (2.420). Just as the Son, after God, is the greatest in Heaven, so is Satan the greatest in Hell; none but the Son and Satan answer in the affirmative to the threat of death, or, in Satan's case, "unbecoming." However, there are two major differences in the significance of the vocal answers. First, the Son volunteers himself for certain death to save humanity, while Satan only abandons himself to chance so that he can commit murder. In this sense, the Son's offer of himself rings true as an intentional and humbling act of love, whereas Satan's volunteering indicates how important he holds his "study of revenge" against God (1.107). The Son's answering voice is wholly selfless out of a desire for humanity to receive grace, whereas Satan's answering voice is only partly selfless and is motivated by envy and desperation.

The other difference between the Son's and Satan's answers is that, unlike the Son, who answers God's question, Satan answers his own question. His reply echoes God's response to his own question as to who will go down to earth to pass judgement on Adam and Eve: "Whom but thee / Vicegerent Son" (10.56-57). Satan's answering his own question shows, in the context of Milton's vocal hierarchy, his insurgent status: he is attempting to play the role of both God and the Son. In contrast, the Son answers God's question, and in his decision to humble himself for

the sake of humanity, his voice makes it possible for Adam and Eve (and the rest of humanity afterward) to beg forgiveness after sinning. The Son's voice is grace in action.

As a result of the Son's choice to vocalize his desire that humanity not lose out to Death and Hell, God exalts the Son, and declares that he "hast been found / By merit more than birthright Son of God, / Found worthiest to be so by being good, / Far more than great or high" (3.8-11). The Son's verbal expression of selfless love represents an inversion of the expected hierarchy, in that the highest in Heaven after God, the Son, is exalted for his willingness to descend the hierarchy and suffer and die for humanity's sin. This humbling act of love echoes various passages in the gospels where Jesus's teachings and behavior invert the expected hierarchies of the time. Jesus thus rebukes the Pharisees for "[loving] the uppermost seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the market" (Lk. 11:43); he declares to Peter that "many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first" (Mt. 19:30); he proclaims that "Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me" (Mt. 26: 45); he relates the story of the rich man and the poor beggar Lazarus, whose positions reverse after death, with Lazarus "carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom" and the rich man cast into "hell" (Lk. 16: 22-23); he points out to his disciples the poor widow, who gives only "two mites" to the treasury while the rich give much more, and declares that "this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they . . . for all they did cast in of their abundance, but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living" (Mk. 12: 42-44); and before the Last Supper, he washes the feet of the disciples, saying to Peter that "I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you" (Jn. 13:15). In Milton's poem, the Son's constant quest to invert the earthly hierarchy of power begins with his decision to raise his voice amidst the silence in Heaven, and it results in God's esteeming him above all and appointing him the proclaimer of the "dread tribunal," the Last Judgment, when

"bad men and angels" will be judged according to how they fell short of the Son's example (3.326, 331).

Before the Son even speaks, however, Milton describes him in strikingly visual language: "the Son of God was seen / Most glorious, in him all his Father shone / Substantially expressed, and in his face / Divine compassion visibly appeared" (3.138-41). Our first look at the Son is exactly that—a look. The Son "is seen" in radiant silence at God's right hand, not heard, and Milton describes his power and goodness as "visibly [appearing]" rather than conveyed through his voice. Milton seems to make this choice deliberately because for him, voice is synonymous with power and authority, as we have seen in his treatment of God's voice. The Son undoubtedly speaks with clear authority as God on Earth, but only because God chooses to transfer his power after the Son's exaltation. Indeed, from the moment the Son wins God's esteem through the merit of his sacrifice, Milton physically depicts the Son: "His words here ended, but his meek aspect / Silent yet spake" (3.266-67). Once the Son has raised his voice above the Heavenly silence, his voice fuses with his image, so that he can now "speak" without saying anything at all. In winning merit through his voice, the Son becomes the image of God, and after the exaltation, the Son does not speak much more in Heaven. Milton refers to him in primarily visual terms, as when he describes the Son's "puissant thigh" (6.714) and his "count'nance too severe to be beheld / And full of wrath bent on his enemies" (6.825-26). The Son does speak with unquestionable authority during the war in Heaven, when "At his command the uprooted hills retired / Each to his place, they heard his voice and went / Obsequious" (6.781-3). However, the Son speaks in such a voice because God has previously told him that "the third [day in the war] is thine; / For thee I have ordained it" (6.699-700).

On this third day, the Son once again strikes an impressive physical pose in his chariot "of paternal deity, / Flashing thick flames" (6.750-1). Milton devotes 18 consecutive lines to describing the Son's chariot in baroque detail. But exempting the Son's command to the hills to return to their previous positions and his brief speech to the angelic host to "rest" and leave the battle to him, the Son remains silent during the battle (6.802). Milton again prefers visual descriptions of the Son to an auditory account. Arriving on the third day in his blazing chariot, the Son is a visualized, begotten incarnation of God's voice. Unlike the angels, the Son has no need to exchange words with Satan and his doomed host; through his God-ordained power, the Son holds in his hand God's weaponized voice, the "ten thousand thunders" that cause Satan and his soon-to-be-fallen angels to lose "all resistance" and "all courage" as they drop their "idle weapons" and throw themselves into the "wasteful deep" (6.836, 838-9, 862).

4 SATAN'S VOICE

The voice of Satan, as Milton must have intended, speaks endlessly enticing words that have made readers through the centuries marvel at Milton's achievement, to the extent that William Blake was convinced that Milton was "of the Devil's party without knowing it" (50). Critics such as Anthony Welch have focused more specifically on how Satan's voice evolves: the devil changes his tone in book 4, reverting into himself and eschewing the traditionally epic and martial speeches that he blasts in hell. At once demonic yet alluring, determined yet changeable, Satan's voice bespeaks a complex character whose attractiveness to readers can confuse efforts to establish Milton's own stance towards him. However, by specifically examining Milton's description of Satan's physical voice and its effects on those who hear it, we can realize how Milton depicts Satan as an attractive and ostentatious, but nonetheless insurgent entity in the heavenly hierarchy, a pretender of authority, a criminal who hopelessly tries to use reason to argue against divine will.

Satan's voice opens the dialogue of *Paradise Lost,* and in these passages Milton establishes the blueprint that he will repeatedly use when describing Satan's voice. Satan dramatically speaks his first words from within the flaming lake, "bold words" that "[break] the horrid silence . . . / 'If thou beest he'" (1.82-83). Milton builds Satan's voice up as audacious, loud, and clear despite his wretched state, and yet his first word is the subordinate conjunction "If." Right from the beginning of *Paradise Lost,* Milton declares that the best that Satan can hope for in his sinful state is bold uncertainty. In presenting Satan's voice as confident and courageous despite his misery, Milton seems to tempt us with empty promises of impossible glory, feeding our desire to witness a heroic and doomed struggle in the face of insurmountable odds. Stanley Fish thought as much when he wrote that the reader of *Paradise Lost* is "simultaneously a

participant in the action and a critic of his own performance" (ix). Fish's words are especially pertinent because they serve as a reminder of how Satan's struggles and strivings can distract from one immensely important comparison: Satan is brimming with high, confident speech, and his actions—leading a dramatic battle against God in Heaven, rousing his astonished comrades from the lake of fire, flying through the perils of Chaos, tricking his way into Eden, and, finally, corrupting Adam and Eve—appear no less grand and impressive.

However, unlike God, Satan must speak his plans first, then enact them within the confines of time. As we have seen, God's voice has no such limitations. His voice and his action are one and the same, unbound by the constraints of time and motion. It follows, then, that all of Satan's apparently grand actions, proclaimed so brazenly by his voice beforehand, can only happen because God allows them to occur through Satan's own exercise of free will. Satan's rebellion in Heaven concludes prematurely on the third day when God reserves it for the "glory" of his Son (6.701); Satan is able to rise from the burning lake in Hell only thanks to the "will / And high permission of all-ruling Heaven" (1.211-12); he is saved from oblivion in the midst of Chaos only by "ill chance" (2.935); Satan flees Gabriel and his squadron at the conclusion of book 4 as he "looked up and knew" he could not win, seeing God's "mounted scale aloft" (4.1013-14); and finally, Satan's corruption of Adam and Eve is possible only because God creates them, like Satan himself, "sufficient to have stood, though free to fall" (3.99). Readers may find themselves mesmerized by Satan's apparent grandiosity in speech and deed, but compared to God, such grandeur is pitifully deficient.

The empty grandeur of Satan's voice and actions is the first of many vocal aspects that illustrate his insurgent status in the heavenly hierarchy. Also important is how his fellow devils

perceive the sound of his voice. Beelzebub reassures Satan, after they escape the lake of fire and regard the remainder of their crew, that

If once they hear [your] voice, their liveliest pledge
Of hope in fears and dangers, heard so oft
In worst extremes, and on the perilous edge
Of battle when it raged, in all assaults
Their surest signal, they will soon resume
New courage and revive. (1.274-79)

For Beelzebub, the arch-fiend's voice represents the ultimate rallying point for all of the other fallen angels. He does not say that the legions will awaken from their stupor when they see Satan, or when they touch him or smell him, as none of this may be possible in the midst of "darkness visible," enchained, and surrounded by "ever-burning sulfur" (1.63, 69). Rather, Beelzebub refers to the physical sound of Satan's voice as the entity of hope upon which all the hellish legions rely. Milton implies through Beelzebub's martial glorification of Satan's voice that Hell, like Heaven, is a monarchy, with Satan as its undisputed warrior king.

Beelzebub's words prove correct when Satan calls out to his still-astonished crew, and "to their general's voice they soon obeyed / Innumerable" (1.336-37). Still recovering from the horrific sight of the Son wielding God's thunder in a flaming chariot, from the ensuing nine-day fall through chaos, and from their subsequent nine-day stupor on a burning lake, the hellish host jolt awake at Satan's voice, "as when men wont to watch / On duty, sleeping found by whom they dread" (1.332-3). The authority in Satan's voice prompts the demonic host to behave

guiltily, as if chastised by a moral agent. Of course, Satan is the antithesis of a moral agent, yet his followers adhere to him as if he were, as unfallen angels adhere to God's voice in Heaven when, after God exalts the Son, "No sooner had th' Almighty ceased, but all / The multitude of angels with a shout / Loud as from numbers without number, sweet / As from blest voices, uttering joy, Heav'n rung / With jubilee" (3.344-48). Once again, Milton presents Satan's voice as the primary means by which he pretends divine authority. Indeed, Milton's simile of the fallen angels starting awake at Satan's rebuke recalls Jesus's agony in the Garden of Gethsemane in the Gospel of Matthew, when, finding the disciples asleep after he returns from harrowing prayer, he chastises Peter: "What, could ye not watch with me for one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Mt. 26.40-1). This allusion is especially telling because shortly before admonishing Peter, Jesus's human fear is on full display, as he falls on his face, begging God to "let this cup pass from me" (Mt. 26.39). Jesus's fear highlights his vulnerability, which is then conveyed touchingly to Peter, who is unaware that Jesus is speaking not only of the weakness of Peter's flesh, but also of his own.

Satan's words, by comparison, though spoken in the midst of Hell after a crushing defeat, are not meant to convey vulnerability at all—quite the opposite. Satan's censure mirrors Jesus's on the surface, and yet he does not speak his words in earnest like Jesus. Instead, the devil's voice bites and tears with bitter sarcasm:

> have ye chos'n this place
> After the toil of battle to repose
> Your wearied virtue, for the ease you find
> To slumber here . . . ?

Or in this abject posture have ye sworn
To adore the conqueror . . . ? (1.318-23)

Satan's voice burns with caustic contempt, and it is a testament to the sinful state of his followers that they react to this mordant voice with "abashed" guilt and renewed resolve (1.331). Their response implies two possibilities, both of which indicate the imposing power that Satan's voice possesses for them: they might feel a selfish need to escape Satan's dreadful censure, or they might feel a prideful need to take advantage of their atrocious situation and impress their leader with their steadfastness and courage.

Satan's crew likely fears his wrath, since Milton later says, regarding the terrifying prospect of oblivion in a mission through chaos, that they "Dreaded not more th' adventure than his voice / Forbidding" (2.474-75). Satan's voice inspires not mere obedience, or awe, or even fear, but dread. In its most common sense, *dread* combines all these responses; *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines its verb form as "To fear greatly, be in mortal fear of; to regard with awe or reverence, venerate" (*OED*). The implication is that the demonic host is thus committing a form of idolatry by treating Satan's voice, rather than God's, as worthy of worship. Immediately after Milton mentions the bad angels' dread, he cements their idolatry in plainest form: "Towards [Satan] they bend / With awful reverence prone; and as a god / Extol him equal to the highest in Heav'n" (2.477-79). In this pivotal scene that mirrors Heaven's praise of the Son (3.344-71), albeit diabolically in a cracked reflection, Milton establishes Satan's voice and the dread it inspires as the central axis about which all of Hell revolves.

Reflections by definition are secondary, however, and in drawing parallels between heavenly and hellish gatherings, with the issue of audible voice at the center, Milton firmly

suggests that Satan can hope for nothing more than insurgency within the poem's broader hierarchy of power. Milton's purpose is clearest when comparing the heavenly council in book 3 with the hellish council in book 2.[13] As discussed previously, Milton subordinates the Son to God by describing the Son's goodness as visibly conveyed, rather than expressed through his voice. Despite the Son's demonstrating his own secondary authority by asserting himself in conversation with God in book 3, the primary authority of voice is God's alone. Milton erects a mirroring hierarchy between Satan and Beelzebub during the council in book 2. Although Satan claims in his speech that begins the council that he and his fallen angels enjoy an advantage over the "tyranny of Heaven" because "none sure will claim in Hell / Precedence," Milton's clear hierarchy says otherwise (1.124, 2.32-33). Like God, Satan begins the council, and when Beelzebub eventually rises to address the bad angels, his visual description mirrors the description of the Son in book 3:

with grave
Aspect he rose, and in his rising seemed
A pillar of state; deep on his front engraven
Deliberation sat and public care;
and princely council in his face yet shone,
Majestic though in ruin: sage he stood
With Atalantean shoulders fit to bear
The weight of the mightiest monarchies; his look

[13] I am using "council" loosely when referring to the Heavenly Council in book 3. Hellish councils resemble more closely what we imagine a "council" to be, with debates and discussions from myriad entities. Heavenly "councils," by comparison, primarily consist of God speaking back and forth with the Son.

Drew audience and attention still as night

Or summer's noontime air, while thus he spake. (2.300-09)

Beelzebub's "aspect" is the focus here—his external appearance. Milton describes the contours of his face and the robustness of his shoulders, and emphasizes how Beelzebub's "look," rather than his voice, attracts the reverent and deferential attention of the demons. Even though, aside from Satan, "none higher [sit]" than Beelzebub, his unremarkable voice indicates his subordinate status.[14] Just as Milton describes the Son visually as an accessory to the absolute authority of God's voice, he describes Beelzebub visually as Satan's viceroy, whose speech reemphasizes a plan "first devised / By Satan" (2.379-80). Affirming the hellish hierarchy, Milton rhetorically asks "for whence, / But from the author of all ill could spring / So deep a malice . . . ?" (2.380-83). Stephen Dobranski describes this profane order, writing that Milton "takes pains to describe a hierarchy" in Hell, one in which Satan's "anger is fiercer, his resentment deeper, and his punishment consequently more severe" (114). Milton is unambiguous about this particular hierarchy; at the end of the hellish council in book 2, as Satan rises from his "exalted" throne (2.5), Milton refers to him as "The monarch" (2.467)—of all the bad angels, there is no question who rules in Hell.

Satan's eminence in Hell may mimic God's in Heaven, but Milton is careful to distinguish the authority of Satan's voice from God's. Satan has an actual physical appearance that Milton describes many times, variously as "huge" (1.196), "with expanded wings" (1.225), "unblest feet" (1.238), and a face marred by "Deep scars of thunder" (1.601), complete with "faded cheek" (1.602), "brows / Of dauntless courage" (1.602-3), and "cruel" eyes (1.604).

[14] Milton solidifies Beelzebub's position as second-in-command by having Satan sitting higher than him, a reflection of the Son's description as "beyond compare" (3.138).

Milton slightly complicates this point, however, since Satan is a shapeshifter (as seen in book 4 by his lightning-fast assumption of various animal shapes), and since the visual account of Satan is limited until book 10. Despite these complications, Satan remains limited by his physical body, whose scars, and, indeed, whose mere corporeality, reflect his fallen state. Stephen Dobranski has called attention to this point, arguing that Milton paradoxically depicts Satan and his followers as both "invisible"—because they remain immaterial spirits—and "visualized," because "through their sin they are falling into the material" (129). By contrast, God—though he possesses an eye, an ear, and a mouth, if only metaphorically—cannot be pinned down by any physical description, other than one that emphasizes his overwhelming brightness: he is "invisible / Amidst the glorious brightness where [he] sitt'st / Throned inaccessible" (3.374-82). Not even the angels can withstand God's physical brightness, and "with both wings veil their eyes" when they are anywhere close to him (3.382). When God commends Abdiel, "a voice / From midst a golden cloud . . . [is] heard" (6.27-28). God seems a disembodied voice, and his essence and voice are one in the same, in contrast to Satan whose voice, though undeniably powerful, is always embodied.

Additionally, whereas Satan's voice can only resound "so loud," God's voice can create a synesthetic effect, as it does when he speaks and "ambrosial fragrance filled / All Heav'n" (1.314-15, 3.135-36). God's voice has such a command over physical laws that it can literally speak smells. A lesser entity and a hopelessly inferior imitator such as Satan can only approximate this show of power when his monstrous offspring Death "snuffed the smell / Of mortal change on Earth" (10.272-73). But it is not by the authority of Satan's voice that the smell of death and decay permeates the fallen world. Death, though sired by Satan, remains a separate entity. His destruction underlines the free will that God gives to Adam and Eve, which could

have prevented Death's temporary domain over Earth. God foretells that this domain will "burn, and from her ashes spring / New Heav'n and Earth" where Death will reign no longer, a domain devoid of any satanic residue, where "God shall be all in all" (3.334-5, 341). We see foreshadowing of this final triumph over Satan in God's punishment of him and the other fallen angels; God turns them into serpents in a striking display of *contrapasso*. Milton uses this final scene of Satan in *Paradise Lost* to display God's final mutation of Satan's audible voice, cementing the devil's inferiority in the hierarchy of power: "he would have spoke, / But hiss for hiss returned with forkèd tongue / To forkèd tongue" (10.517-18). Satan's booming, Achilles-like rhetoric has now dwindled and been debased to a pre-linguistic, animal noise.

5 ADAM AND EVE'S VOICES

Adam and Eve have three main charges as humans living in Paradise. The first, and most obvious, is to obey God's "sole command" (8.329) not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge, a command which, even in Adam's unfallen state, "resounds / Yet dreadful in mine ear" (8.334-35). The second is to "lop [the] wanton growth" from Paradise's vegetation, among other landscaping chores (4.629). Notably, this physical labor, which Adam refers to as "the daily work of mind or body," is what sets him and Eve apart from the other animals, rather than their ability to speak (4.629). Adam describes the other animals, which "all day long / Rove idle unemployed," in contrast to himself and Eve, who are employed in God's work tending the garden of Paradise (4.616-17). It is in their ability to perform this work, in Adam's eyes, that separates humanity from the animals. In book 7, Raphael describes how humanity is distinguished from the animals by having "heart and voice and eyes" (7.513) that are meant to praise God, but it is noteworthy that, before he speaks with Raphael, Adam considers work, and not speech, as the quality that differentiates himself and Eve.

Still, Adam clearly understands the third charge: to listen to the angelic spirits around them, and to emulate their exalting sounds in prayer. In book 4, when the unfallen Adam and Eve are happily speaking to each other, Adam remarks to Eve: "how often from the steep / Of echoing hill or thicket have we heard / Celestial voices to the midnight air, / Sole, or responsive to each other's note / Singing their great Creator" (4.680-84). He then goes on to talk about how

> oft in bands
> While they keep watch, or nightly rounding walk
> With Heav'nly touch of instrumental sounds

In full harmonic number joined, their songs
Divide the night, and lift our thoughts to Heaven. (4.685-88)

Adam is speaking here of the "millions of spiritual creatures" who "walk the earth / Unseen," God's angels who have descended to Earth from Heaven to do his bidding (4.677-78). Adam and Eve experience many of these angels aurally, and it is the "harmonic" and "instrumental" sounds of the angelic songs that encourage them to "lift [their] thoughts to Heaven."

Crucially, the audible voices of the angels remind Adam and Eve of their divine origin—they cannot see many of the angels around them, but they can hear them. Eve does, however, describe how Satan appears in her dream as "One shaped and winged like one of those from Heav'n / By us oft seen," perhaps implying a contradiction between Adam's account of God's "Unseen" emissaries (5.55-56). Yet if the first couple's eyes "oft" see some of the angels, their ears apparently hear more—"millions"—of them. These audible angelic voices represent an essential conjunction between Heaven and humanity, which takes on corporeal, visual form in Raphael in book 5. But even then, Raphael's principal role is to speak to Adam. Indeed, God chooses Raphael specifically for this task, who Milton calls "That sociable Spirit," implying that he is uniquely suited to this assignment because he enjoys speaking and conversation (5.221). God charges Raphael to "converse with Adam" (5.230) and "such discourse bring on, / As may advise him of his happy state" (5.234). The main method that God employs to inform Adam is conversational, verbal. Though Adam and Eve are amazed at the "glorious shape" (5.309) of Raphael as he approaches them through the trees and his visual splendor surely contributes to his authority, the heavenly messenger's appearance does not function as God's primary pedagogical tool. And while Adam asks the angel many questions, his main role in books 5 through 7—as

evinced by the dominant voice of Raphael throughout these three books, describing the War in Heaven and the Creation—is to listen.

Aside from imparting to Adam the knowledge of the past, Raphael also models for Adam and Eve ideal speech, which is proper prayer to God. Adam and Eve already know how to pray, as shown by their unanimous prayers soon after they enter the poem (4.724). But Raphael nonetheless makes a point, over and over throughout book 7, to mention angelic prayer to Adam. The angel describes how, after God relates his plan for the creation of Earth and humanity, "Glory [the angels] sung to the most high, good will / To future men," a united angelic voice raised up in praise of God and support for humanity (7.182-83). As commentators have discussed, this exaltation of God's plan echoes the angelic proclamation, after the birth of Jesus, to the shepherds in the gospel of Luke, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (2:14). The function of such an echo, I would stress, is to imply that a united angelic voice praises God and supports humanity through all time: the past, present, and future.

When describing the angelic reaction to the creation, Raphael again relates how the angels infuse the cosmos with their voices: "with joy and shout / The hollow universal orb they filled, / And touched their golden harps, and hymning praised / God and his works" (7.256-59). Angelic choirs are one of Raphael's repeated themes in his story of the Creation, from the "Angelic harmonies" (7.560) after the sixth day of creation to musical sounds "intermixed with voice / Choral or unison" (7.598-99) that attend God's rest on the seventh day. Raphael's relating the angelic praise that accompanies creation might be just as important as the creation itself; otherwise, there would be no need for Raphael to repeat himself frequently. Raphael's repetition, which has no biblical precedent in Genesis, helps to model for Adam and Eve a proper response to God's actions, and specifically, what this response sounds like. Raphael's description of the

angelic song (7.601-32) is thus a pedagogical tool for the couple to remember. In this context, Raphael describes to Adam what distinguishes humanity from the animals—the ability "to correspond with Heav'n" (7.511)—reminding Adam that he and Eve originate in God, and that they are therefore charged to recall their origin by direct "correspondence," or audible prayer that God can hear within the invisible realm of Heaven.[15]

The effect of Raphael's voice on Adam is another indication of humanity's divine origin, and Milton highlights the theme of audible voice specifically with Adam to emphasize this point. After Raphael describes Creation, "The Angel ended, and in Adam's ear / So charming left his voice, that he a while / Thought him still speaking" (8.1-3). Raphael's voice affects Adam so profoundly that the past blends into the present, with the angel's account of Creation seeming to echo in Adam's ear. Later, in book 8, buoyed by the angel's conversation and prepared to relate the story of his own origin, Adam declares to Raphael that "while I sit with thee, I seem in Heav'n, / And sweeter thy discourse is to my ear / Than fruits of a palm-tree pleasantest to thirst / And hunger both" (8.210-13). Raphael repays the compliment: "Nor are thy lips ungraceful, sire of men, / Nor tongue ineloquent" (8.218-19), and he describes Adam's vocal qualities as reflecting God's "image fair" (8.221).[16] The angel also singles out Adam's voice as evidence of the "gifts" that God has "abundantly" bestowed on him (8.220), and it is important to mention that the gift of speech, of audible voice, is given and employed directly, rather than learned and refined over time. Adam, relating his own creation, describes how "to speak I tried, and forewith

[15] In book 5, as part of their morning prayers, Adam and Eve urge the animals to "Join voices all ye living souls" and for the birds specifically to "bear on your wings and in your notes his praise" (5.197, 199). The couple's prayer, though directed in deference to the "Almighty," shows their understanding of a vocal hierarchy, an understanding that echoes Genesis 1:28, in which God commands Adam and Eve to "have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth."

[16] The word "image" here does not necessarily refer to a visual phenomenon, since Raphael immediately follows up this word with "Speaking or mute all comeliness and grace / Attends thee" (8.222-23). Rather, the angel uses "image" in the metaphorical sense of "reflection."

spake, / My tongue obeyed and readily could name / Whate'er I saw" (8.271-73). His voice is instinctual, and he immediately begins naming things, starting with the sun.[17] Adam's verbally naming things in Creation, which recalls Genesis 2:19, suggests that his audible voice is an instrument of a dominion proclaimed by God in Genesis 1:28 and in Raphael's depiction of Creation (7.532-34). His voice, which encompasses his reason, his free will, and his divine origin all at once, therefore becomes one of the principal methods, along with tending the vegetation of Paradise, for acting out his and Eve's apical position in Creation.

It follows, then, that Adam's desire for "fellowship" (8.389) cannot be satisfied by the other animals because they do not have the power of audible voice to exchange with him. Indeed, Adam is bold enough to declare to God that "Much less can bird with beast, or fish with fowl / So well converse, nor with the ox the ape; / Worse then can man with beast, and least of all" (8.395-97). Adam wants someone to talk to, specifically an equal, as he asks God: "Among unequals what society / Can sort, what harmony or true delight?" (8.383-84). God will grant his desire in Eve, who will be his equal, as shown during their unanimous evening (4.724-35) and morning prayers (5.153-208, 9.198). Without Eve's voice to join with his own, Adam has a sense of "deficiency" (8.416), and, in responding to God's gentle humor, distinguishes himself from his creator by saying that "Thou in thyself art perfect" because God does not need what he needs—God "seek'st not / Social communication" (8.428-29), whereas Adam needs a social companion.[18]

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[17] In Genesis 2, Adam only names animals. His naming the sun in *Paradise Lost* is a Miltonic invention, and an indication that the power of his audible voice to define the world around him is even greater in the poem than the biblical precedent. Even more intriguingly, John Leonard has suggested that Adam, in another scene original to Milton, names Eve, and that only after Adam names her does she "permit him to lead her to their bower" (40). Leonard's reading here assigns still more power to Adam's voice, while at the same time advocating for Eve's independence. This analysis is distinct from the Bible, in which Adam only names Eve after the Fall (Gen. 3:20).

[18] Among the many things Adam does not know is that God has, in fact, created a sociable companion in the Son, who primarily talks with God.

Adam's companion, Eve, has polarized generations of critics. "Both before and after the Fall," declared Dr. Johnson, "the superiority of Adam is diligently sustained" (705). C. S. Lewis likewise had no difficulty in asserting that Eve is "Adam's inferior" (120), and William Empson agreed, claiming her character proves that "Milton thought that men ought to control women" (151). In the same vein, Fredson Bowers held that Eve is equated with "passion," and that the Fall happens because Adam's reason "relinquishes its sovereignty" over Eve's passion and leaves her vulnerable to sin (265). In the early twenty century, however, critics began to explore more fully the text's complexity while re-discovering a wealth of earlier, often female commentators who found that Milton's portrayal of Eve contradicts the statements made about her—and even by her—in the poem. Stella Revard, for one, disagreed with Bowers, holding that "passion . . . is not a peculiarly female disability," but rather is "the very essence of all sin, be it Satan's, Eve's, or Adam's (77). Shari A. Zimmerman joined Revard in defending Eve, arguing that although the poem's male characters (including the narrator) view femininity as "vain and seductive . . . and infantile and dependent," Eve is a "much more complicated figure" (247). Diane Kelsey McColley expanded such a defense of Eve, arguing in her ground-breaking book that Milton depicts the first woman, despite her vulnerability, as a "pattern and composition of active goodness and a speaking picture of the recreative power of poetry itself" (4). This positive interpretation of Eve anticipated Joseph Wittreich's work, in which he favorably compared Milton's treatment of Eve to that of his predecessors and contemporaries, citing, among other things, the "exquisite poetry" (103) of Eve's last speech—the poem's final spoken words—which, unlike Adam's "tragic laments" (104), "requires no correction" (107).

My analysis of Eve's voice will specifically echo Zimmerman's contention; there are aspects of her voice, or lack thereof, that might imply that she exists below Adam in the vocal

hierarchy I have elucidated. However, for each of these points, there exists a corresponding argument that complicates such a simplistic reading of Eve. Throughout my analysis, a vocal identity of Eve will emerge, which shows in important ways that she is Adam's equal, despite the fact that she is the first to fall. Even if, as Deirdre Keenan McCrystal says, Milton "cannot absolutely transcend his own historical context and dismantle the social, cultural, religious, and linguistic patriarchal structure" (492), an analysis of Eve's voice in *Paradise Lo*st underlines the complexity of his views about the mother of humanity.

The lens of audible voice provides the strongest argument in favor of Adam and Eve's hierarchical equality. The point is simple: whenever the couple pray to God, both before (4.724-35, 5.153-208, 9.198) and after (10.1099-104) the Fall, they speak with one voice. In the most elevated words that they both speak—as the prayers are addressed directly to God—their voices are indistinguishable from one another. Raphael may call Eve Adam's "weaker," (6.909), but in light of their equality in worship, it is not clear that the angel means that Eve is somehow "lesser" than Adam. Indeed, Raphael's words mirror 1 Peter 3.7, in which husbands are urged to "giv[e] honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life." This passage seems to imply equality between the sexes more than anything else, with "weaker" perhaps only denoting lesser physical strength. In any case, from the perspective of God, the voices he hears from Adam and Eve in prayer are always joined. After Eve's creation, neither of them prays separately in the poem; this union in elevated voice suggests ultimate equality between them in the eyes of God.

From a vocal standpoint, however, Eve is conspicuously absent from large sections of the poem. First, and most simply, the conversations with Raphael from books 4-7 are almost exclusively between the angel and Adam, despite Eve being present the whole time (7.50-51).

The patriarchal Raphael also, it seems insultingly, concludes his account of the war in Heaven by instructing Adam to “warn / Thy weaker” (6.908-09), even though we are told that Eve is sitting there. The only words that Raphael says directly to Eve are, “Hail mother of mankind, whose fruitful womb / Shall fill the world more numerous with thy sons / Than with these various fruits the trees of God / Have heaped this table” (5.388-91). For her part, Eve says nothing at all to Raphael; despite her presence during the angel's stories of the War in Heaven and the Creation, she utters no comments and asks no questions. She gladly cedes the spoken word to Adam, which her partner is only too happy to accept.

This verbal arrangement, however, does not necessarily depict an unequal vocal hierarchy between Adam and Eve. While it is true that Raphael only speaks the single sentence to her, it carries enormous implications. In those short few words, he singles her out as the mother of humanity and of humanity’s salvation, allying her directly to Mary by anticipating Luke 1:42, when Elisabeth hails Mary, proclaiming “Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb.” Perhaps Raphael’s words to Eve are a case of quality over quantity; the importance of the pronouncement that ties her directly to the mother of humanity’s savior ought not be understated. It is not enough to assume Eve’s vocal subservience simply because she speaks less than Adam.

Indeed, Eve seems to be quite confident about her own place among the poem’s speaking characters, and her ease becomes clear when she leaves Raphael and Adam to converse alone while she tends to her “fruits and flowers” (8.44). Eve does not leave because she lacks the ability to understand the celestial motions, as Milton emphasizes when he says: “Yet went she not, as not with such discourse / Delighted, or not capable her ear / Of what was high" (8.48-50). Rather, Milton declares, “Her husband the relater she preferred” because Adam will intermix his

explanations with “conjugal caresses” and kisses (8.52, 56). Whereas Adam presumably enjoys words without any other accompaniment, Eve appears to be more sensually driven, so that “Not words alone pleased her” (8.57). But this more material aspect of her nature is not necessarily an overt weakness. Joseph Wittreich calls attention to the potential wisdom in Eve’s exit, asserting that she is “already in possession of the lesson that Adam must learn; she knows when it is time “to know no more,” when to be lowly wise (4.637-38)” (92). Adam underscores the ambiguity of what Eve’s voice, or lack thereof, actually entails, when he declares to Raphael in book 8 that Eve is his “inferior, in the mind / And inward faculties . . . / In outward also her resembling less / His image who made both” (8.541-44), but then he turns right around and contradicts himself, describing how

> yet when I approach
> Her loveliness, so absolute she seems
> And in herself complete, so well to know
> Her own, that what she wills to do or say,
> Seems wisest, virtuousest, discreetest, best. (8.546-50)

While Adam may consider himself Eve’s superior in “mind,” his conviction falters when he thinks of her whole person, and most particularly the suggested superiority “what she wills to do or say.” Eve’s voice, silent amidst Raphael and Adam’s conversation through books 4-7, is clearly compelling enough to make the loquacious Adam pause and question where he stands hierarchically compared to his wife.

Eve's more sensual preferences, glimpsed when she retires to her "fruits and flowers" (8.44), present a curious lens through which to analyze the role of her voice and her receptivity to other voices. Before the couple's evening prayer in book 4, Milton takes care to present Eve, in her words to Adam, as an especially sensual creature who is transfixed by the sensory aspects of Creation:

With thee conversing I forget all time,
All the seasons and their change, all please alike.
Sweet is the breath of the morn, her rising sweet,
With charm of earliest birds; pleasant the sun
When first on this delightful land he spreads
His orient beams, on herb, tree, fruit, and flow'r,
Glist'ring with dew; fragrant the fertile earth
After soft showers; and sweet the coming on
Of grateful evening mild, then silent night
With this her solemn bird and this fair moon,
And these gems of heav'n, her starry train. (4.639-49)

The sights, sounds, and smells of Paradise delight Eve to a unique degree; nowhere in the poem does Adam embark on such a lush and comprehensive description of his surroundings. While it is true that Adam expresses the force of his sensual passion to Raphael, most specifically in describing "transported touch" (8.530), his account does not match Eve's in breadth. She spares no detail, encompassing nature's spectrum in her descriptions of morning and night, sun and

moon, sunlight and rain, morning birds and nightingales. She notably uses "sweet" three times, to describe the morning breeze, the morning sunrise, and the approach of evening, and this word can depict that which is pleasing both to sense of taste and smell, indicating the all-inclusive nature of her sensory appreciation (*OED*).

Eve prefaces this appreciation of Creation with the declaration that she "forget[s] all time" (4.639) when talking to Adam, and Milton highlights this tendency to become aurally engrossed as the aspect of her sensual disposition that might make her a better target for Satan's temptations than Adam. From her first appearance in book 4, it could be argued that Milton depicts Eve as suggestible to the sounds of voices, whether celestial, terrestrial, or demonic. That she reacts to these voices, regardless of their source, with innocent curiosity, may suggest that her more sensually-driven nature is at the heart of Raphael's terming her Adam's "weaker" (6.909). There is some evidence for this contention: soon after her own creation, Eve does not know the identity of the voice that tells her to "follow me" (4.469), and yet she obeys without question, rhetorically asking Adam: "What could I do, / But follow straight, invisibly thus led?" (4.475-76). It could be argued that Eve's behavior underscores her aural susceptibility, especially in light of Maura Josephine Smyth's reminder that, at this point, Eve knows nothing of God, "only that there is a Voice" (142), a voice she immediately follows.

There is more to this scene than Eve's supposedly unique aural suggestibility, however. First of all, Milton also shows Adam to be prone to conversational absorption, as when previously mentioned, at the opening of book 8, Raphael stops talking and "in Adam's ear / So charming left his voice, that he a while / Thought him still speaking" (8.1-3). Second, the voice that calls Eve does not give her a command, but rather presents an argument and an opportunity. "Follow me," the voice says, "And I will bring thee where no shadow stays / Thy coming"

(4.469-71). Eve hears the voice's reasons and is persuaded; her actions are therefore a far cry from those who assert that she unquestioningly obeys the voice without thought or contemplation. Jane M. Petty emphasizes this point, holding that "while Eve has been called susceptible and vulnerable, her very sensitivity and perception reveal her as more receptive and creative than Adam" (45). Perhaps it is more accurate to say that this "sensitivity and perception," rather than "suggestibility," defines Eve's aural experiences.

Why, then, do Gabriel and his squadron discover Satan "Squat like a toad, close at the ear of Eve; / Assaying by his devilish art to reach / The organs of her fancy" (4.800-02)? If Eve is sensitive and perceptive rather than suggestible, why does Satan single her out for temptation, specifically choosing to whisper pernicious words into her ear, which infiltrate through her sleeping mind as a "gentle voice" that she mistakes for Adam's (5.37)? The text is again ambiguous. On one hand, Satan has overheard Adam and Eve's earlier conversation, specifically Eve's paean to the sensual wonders of Creation (4.639-49), so it might be argued that Satan identifies Eve as an easier target for his perverting designs. Again, this argument for Eve's sensual suggestibility, particularly to voice, has some textual evidence. Milton declares that Satan's whisperings are intended to "forge / illusions as he list, phantasms and dreams," and, that if these are not initially successful, "he might taint / Th' animal spirits that from pure blood arise" and "raise / At least distempered, discontented thoughts, / Vain hopes, vain aims, inordinate desires / Blown up with high conceits engend'ring pride" (4.802-09). Appealing to Eve's material proclivities becomes one of Satan's main avenues of attack as he softly whispers words that she hears in a dream. He inquires why she sleeps at night, since it is "the pleasant time, / the cool, the silent, save where silence yields / To the night-warbling bird, that now awake / Tunes sweetest his love-labored song" (5.38-41). He then goes on to extol the "pleasing light"

of the moon as he paints a dazzling picture of the "eyes" of stars in the sky staring down at her beauty (5.42, 44). Satan lures Eve with material descriptions of the aspects of night that are pleasing to the senses, all in an effort to have her adopt an aberrant rhythm, first to shun sleep at night, and ultimately, to shun God's sole commandment.

Once more, however, Eve's character is more complicated than this analysis admits, particularly in her ability to resist vocal temptation. Even if it is true that Satan targets Eve because of her assumed weakness for sensual predilections, his failure to corrupt Eve in her dream indicates that he might be mistaken in his assumption. Indeed, in her dream, Eve reacts with "damp horror" (5.65) when she sees Satan pluck and eat the fruit, and though her appetite "quicken[s]" (5.85) when he holds part of the fruit to her mouth, it is not clear that she tastes it. In any case, Satan's first attempt at corrupting Eve through his voice does not result in her sinning, and so must be judged a failure on his part and a triumph on Eve's. One might say that this initial encounter between Satan and Eve foreshadows her eventual sin, but this interpretation is teleological; because of her free will, her sin was never assured. Did Satan's initial, underhanded attack on Eve—which Milton invents entirely—have a lasting effect that makes her more susceptible to temptation in book 9? Could Milton be offering a partial explanation—but not of course an exoneration—of why Eve ultimately succumbs to temptation? Such an explanation would undermine critics like Lewis, Empson, and Bowers, who all assert that Eve is the first to sin because she is weaker than Adam.

Despite Satan's initial failure, however, when the devil tempts the fully-conscious Eve in book 9, audible voice is a central aspect of his plan, and one of the crucial elements that ultimately leads Eve to sin. Hearing Satan talking through the serpent's mouth, Eve marvels at how the serpent "cam'st thou speakable of mute" (9.563) with "human voice" (9.561), and

immediately identifies this "human voice" as the reason why the serpent has "grown above the rest / Of brutal kind" (9.564-65). Milton has already shown Eve to understand her place alongside Adam in the vocal hierarchy that places the two of them above the animals (5.197, 199), and so she becomes all the more fascinated when the serpent, who should be beneath her, rises above the other animals because of its "human voice." Eve refers to this conundrum as a "miracle" (9.562), and her astonishment at the apparent aberration in the vocal hierarchy renders her vulnerable to Satan's lies. The chief lie that Satan expounds, and Milton's most notable innovation to the Genesis narrative, is that the fruit of the forbidden tree has transformed the serpent from "brute" to "human" and will therefore raise Eve from "human" to "gods" (9.712). Satan deviously plays upon Eve's understanding of the vocal hierarchy; by virtue of having attained audible voice, the serpent has become, in Satan's words, "internal man" (9.711), since voice is one of the main elements separating humans from the other animals. If Eve eats the fruit, Satan reasons, then she will ascend even higher in the hierarchy and become like God. Audible voice, then, becomes the crucial fulcrum that causes Eve to entertain her own pride and vacillate in her duty to obey God.

Milton is following biblical precedent here, as the serpent in Genesis tempts Eve with his voice, but Milton again innovates, imagining Eve's musing to herself after hearing Satan's urge to sin. She declares that "Great are thy virtues, doubtless, best of fruits" (9.745) because it supposedly "Gave elocution to the mute, and taught / The tongue not made for speech to speak thy praise" (7.748-49). As Eve ponders the fruit, the potential benefits of eating it seem to emanate from the anomaly of the serpent's audible voice. And while it is true that Satan has incorporated the serpent's myriad visual characteristic to tempt her—as he does when "New parts put on, and as to passion moved, / Fluctuates disturbed, yet comely and in act / Raised"

(9.667-69)—it is the marvel of his serpent's voice, an aberration of the vocal hierarchy that Eve understands, which invites the aberration of disobedience into her mind.

Indeed, Eve's wavering initially occurs in reaction to the sound of Satan's audible voice. "In her ears the sound / . . . rung of his persuasive words" (9.736-37), as when Satan whispered at her ear in her dream, only this time, the words are more "persuasive" because they come from a talking snake, rather than "One shaped and winged like one of those from Heav'n" (5.55). Readers may wonder what the result might have been had Satan assumed the guise of a talking snake in Eve's dream. In any case, it is only after the sound of Satan's voice has entered her ear that the physical, sensual aspects of the fruit take on a new and seductive appeal. As Eve stares at the fruit, Satan's voice ringing in her ears, "waked / An eager appetite, raised by the smell / So savory of that fruit, which with desire, / Inclinable now grown to touch or taste, / Solicited her longing eye" (9.739-44). The fruit's full sensuous allure tempts her sense of sight, taste, touch, and smell, but only after the sound of Satan's voice invites the temptation of the other senses into Eve's mind. Many scholars might echo Bowers in holding that Eve's "passion" (265), which emanates from an un-checked sensuality, explains her sinful choice, but I side more with McCrystal, who suggests that Eve falls, at least in part, "because she is confused by a shifting frame of reference" (504). It is only after her resolve is softened by Satan's lies, after the stability of the vocal hierarchy has been shaken in her mind, that the fruit appeals to her senses. This "confusion" that McCrystal speaks of is not to excuse Eve, or to somehow claim that she did no wrong. Rather, it is a more compelling explanation, consistent with the vocal hierarchy I have outlined, that explains her decision to sin.

Milton remains focused on audible voice during the aftermath of the Fall, and, in the leadup to the poem's climax, when Adam and Eve choose to lift their voices up and beg God for

forgiveness, the theme of audible voice carries a terrible poignancy, reflecting the pain of the first sin. Adam thinks back in bitter regret to the memory of God's voice, "O voice once heard / Delightfully" (10.729-30), before the same voice becomes "dreadful" (10.121) to him after disobeying God's commandment. The Son, however, descends as a "mild Judge" (10.96), and Milton takes care to mention that he speaks these words "without revile" (10.118). Adam and Eve do not shrink from God's voice because it terrifies them with its loud and horrisonant vituperation, but rather because it reminds them of how badly they have offended. The implication is that God's voice has not changed—instead, it is their auditory frequency that has been altered by sin and mangled by shame, to the extent that Adam longs for death, specifically to escape the sound of God's voice. Adam flirts with despair as he laments:

> How gladly would I meet
> Mortality my sentence, and be earth
> Insensible, how glad would lay me down
> As in my mother's lap! There I should rest
> And sleep secure; his dreadful voice no more
> Would thunder in my ears. (10.775-80)

Again, Adam is not using "thunder" literally; nowhere in book 10 has God spoken to him in thunderous tones. Rather, embroiled in a painful mental struggle about what to do, he has still not fully accepted responsibility for his sin. What truly "thunders" in his ears is his own shame and guilt; and, because Adam has not yet decided to go on living, he directs his lamenting voice against God's voice—and, by extension, God's law and justice—rather than on his sin itself.

Despite how loudly Adam might vociferate to the contrary, though, he understands that "prayer against [God's] absolute decree / No more avails than breath against the wind, / Blown stifling back on him that breathes it forth" (11.311-13). Adam expresses the futility of countering God's law by invoking a simile comparing his own audible voice to breath, and God's law to the wind, recalling God's initial wordless breath into his own nostrils that gave him life (7.526). God's exhalation gave him the free will to breathe in tandem with God's law (which I previously showed might be synonymous with God's voice), and, upon sinning, Adam and Eve's breath becomes out of synch with God's law, which Adam then personifies as a wind that blows against their faces. Met by this steadfast wind, Adam knows that nothing he can say will change its direction, but he reasons with Eve that the severity of God's punishment, despite blowing harshly against their faces, is not a violent storm meant to destroy them. Despite their initial expectation of "immediate dissolution" (10.1049) in the face of God's sentence, Adam reminds Eve of the tone of God's voice, even in judging them: "Remember with what mild / And gracious temper he both heard and judged / Without wrath or reviling" (10.1046-47). In rejecting the option of suicide, Adam takes comfort in the absence of violence in God's voice, which becomes a clue for Adam and Eve about the way they should conduct themselves within the bitter reality of their sin. Despite having committed sin, the gravity of which is clear from God's sentence, Adam understands that the mildness in God's voice conveys encouraging truths: both he and Eve are still alive, still together, and still in possession of their faculties (in particular, their voices). Clearly, the free will (3.124) they have misused still applies, and with it, Adam realizes, comes a responsibility to act in accordance with God's law, regardless of the circumstances.

Adam and Eve's choice, then, to verbally confess their sins represents the triumph of the human voice, the human intention to obey God, which Satan ultimately lacks. Their confession is

full-bodied, conveyed not only with their voices but also their postures, signifying the comprehensive nature of their repentance. Their voices, however, and specifically their "sighs," are the crucial aspect of their confession. They

prostrate fell
Before him reverent, and both confessed
Humbly their faults, and pardon begged, with tears
Watering the ground, and with their sighs the air
Frequenting, sent from hearts contrite, in sign
Of sorrow unfeigned, and humiliation meek. (10.1099-104)

Milton takes the dramatic step, unprecedented in the poem, of repeating verbatim Adam's proposal from several lines earlier, and the repetition emphasizes the importance of the moment, which represents the climax of *Paradise Lost*. At the end of book 10, the fate of humanity hangs in balance. Everything, from the creation of the angels, the exaltation of the Son, Satan's rebellion, the War in Heaven, the creation of the Earth, Satan's temptation, and the original sin, has led up to this moment. If Adam and Eve do not confess their sins, and instead commit suicide, decide never to procreate, or choose to embrace evil as Satan does (4.110), there is no future for humanity, no hope for anything except Hell. Thus far, they have been tasked with three things: obey God's commandment, tend the garden of Paradise, and imitate the angels in prayer. Their Fall introduces a fourth task: they must right their wrongs by audibly lifting their collective voice to Heaven to confess. Their confession recalls their jointly-expressed voice in evening (4.724-35) and morning prayers (5.153-208, 9.198), only this time, their voices are sorrowful,

rather than exultant. An even more notable difference between their confession and their previous prayers is that Milton does not specify the exact words of their repentance. Previously, Milton has depicted Adam and Eve's morning and evening prayers verbatim, as direct quotations from the characters. Here, though, in their most crucial moment, Milton chooses only to declare that Adam and Eve do, in fact, confess, and does not include direct quotations.

The conspicuous absence of Adam and Eve's words of repentance makes sense when viewed within the framework of Milton's vocal hierarchy. While the spoken words of their confession are of course important, it is not their repentant words themselves, but rather their "sighs," that fly up to heaven first, and are heard by the Son: "sighs now breathed / Unutterable, which the spirit of prayer / Inspired, and winged for Heav'n with speedier flight / Then loudest oratory" (11.5-8). The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "sighs" as "more or less audible," and it is in these audible yet wordless vocalizations that Adam and Eve's confession takes on a different meaning (*OED*). Their sighs mean more than their actual words—since there was never a time when either of them existed but could not speak, their arrival at a wordless outpouring of voice in sighs is a new development. It hearkens back to something more primal within them, to a time before they could speak. As we have seen throughout *Paradise Lost*, to speak is to use reason, but Adam and Eve's confession is not about the exercise of reason, even though Adam employs reason to arrive at the conclusion that they should beg forgiveness rather than kill themselves (10.1036). "What better can we do," asks Adam, than to confess (10.1086). The postlapsarian world is one in which humanity must make the best of unfavorable circumstances, and doing the "best" thing is always obeying God. While expressing their sorrow and humiliation through actual words, their "contrite hearts," the direct source of their "sighs," make their confession true (10.1102-03). Milton's decision not to depict the words of their prayer, but

rather to focus in on their "sighs," indicates the depth and profundity of Adam and Eve's confession and illustrates Milton's vocal hierarchy at work: they are so sorry that their remorseful sighs, coming from their hearts, and hearkening back to a time before they could speak or reason, play the central role.

It is fitting, then, that the Son presents these "sighs though mute" (11.31) to God with gladness, saying that they are "Fruits of more pleasing savor from thy seed / Sown with contrition in his heart, than those / Which his own hand manuring all the trees / Of Paradise could have produced" (11.26-29). "Mute" here could mean "wordless," but it could also mean "silent." There is some ambiguity whether Adam and Eve's sighs have an actual sound. Regardless, the couple has moved beyond verbal expression in their appeal for forgiveness; their sighs are more like the intuitive angels, or like God, whose "breath" may or may not have a sound. Without realizing it, Adam and Eve are positioning themselves closer to the divine essence in the earnestness of their pleas. The Son then urges God to "bend thine ear / to supplication" (11.30-31), and he takes special care to declare that the essence of Adam and Eve's confession—their sighs—is enough in its own right, even without his intercession. Contrastingly, when considering the actual words Adam and Eve speak, the Son declares the fallen pair "Unskillful with what words to pray" (11.32). This lack of skill regarding the pair's verbal expressions does not bother the Son, however, and he eagerly volunteers himself to intercede with God on behalf of humanity: "let me / Interpret for him" (11.32-33). The Son understands that Adam and Eve's sighs are a sign of unfeigned obedience, and within their purity of intention he recognizes himself. The wordless sighs "winged for Heav'n with speedier flight / Then loudest oratory" (11.7-8), which recalls God's exaltation of the Son's volunteering himself for sacrifice: "Found worthiest . . . by being good, / Far more than great or high" (3.310-11).

In this way, Adam and Eve emulate the Son in obedience and acknowledge an aspect of God's power that Satan never fully comprehends: the authority to forgive all sins. The couple accomplishes what Satan cannot in book 4 when he briefly considers the idea of repenting. Satan's "sighs" here (4.31), however, do not come from a "contrite heart," but rather from one "inflamed with rage" (4.9), and his failure to ask for forgiveness centers on his pride, which prevents him from "submission," a word which, Satan says, "Disdain forbids me, and my dread of shame / Among the spirits beneath" (4.81-83). He reasons with himself, imagining that he could repent and "obtain / By act of grace my former state" (4.93-94), but then immediately rejects this idea, asking himself "how soon / Would highth recall high thoughts, how soon unsay / What feigned submission swore: ease would recant / Vows made in pain, as violent and void" (4.94-97). A key difference between Satan's tortured musings in book 4 and Adam and Eve's tormented deliberations in book 10 is that Satan never escapes his own thoughts; he repeatedly "back recoils / Upon himself" (4.17), unable to escape the prison of his own mind, his own reason; "for within him," Milton says, "Hell / He brings" (4.20-21). Satan's "sighs" highlight his own tragedy in the vocal hierarchy: he can do the same thing as Adam and Eve, and he also may be able to repent; he simply chooses not to do so.[19] Adam and Eve, by contrast, escape the cycle of their self-inflicted torments; they can navigate through all the terrible labyrinths that befall a sinful mind, arriving at the simple, absolute answer that does not save them from death, but does make eternal life possible for themselves and the rest of humanity. They abandon their pride,

[19] In book 3, God announces to the Son that, during the Last Judgment, the Son "shalt judge / Bad men and angels, they arraigned shall sink / Beneath thy sentence; Hell, her numbers full, / Thenceforth shall be forever shut" (3.330-33). God here is declaring that Satan and the other bad angels will never be saved, but I do not take this to mean that they do not have free will. The option to repent is always before them, but God knows that they will never sue for grace.

embrace submission, and offer up the most genuine expression of sorrow they can: their wordless sighs from “hearts contrite” (10.1103), the purest human expression in a fallen world.

6 CONCLUSION

There are endless lenses through which to read *Paradise Lost*, and I submit that examining the narrative by highlighting audible voice, and the hierarchy it establishes, is a profitable approach which yields provocative results. God emerges as the most steadfast and consistent character, necessarily enigmatic and above all others, whose voice is synonymous with his law. The Son's heroism also shines through, as his voice breaks the silence in Heaven (3.218) on behalf of sinful humanity, just as his silent aspect, bespeaking his secondary status to God in the hierarchy, strikes terror into the rebellious angels when he hurls God's weaponized voice at them, the "ten thousand thunders" (8.836). Satan's tragedy becomes excruciatingly apparent, too, as again and again he attempts to imitate God's high pronouncements, but falls short every time, unable to reconcile God's preeminence with his own pride, until his voice finally descends into a serpent's hiss by divine decree.

Finally, Adam and Eve, as speaking creatures, are positioned at the top of God's earthly hierarchy, and their union in one voice whenever they pray is one of several verbal aspects that complicates critical efforts to relegate Eve as Adam's subordinate. Satan's audible voice in the serpent plays a significant role in disturbing Eve's perception of the vocal hierarchy, which catalyzes her sin; most crucially, Adam and Eve's decision to lift their voices up to heaven and repent, specifically moving beyond verbal expression to the more primal contrition of sighs, represents the epic's climax and demonstrates the human potential to overcome sin and death by appealing contritely to God. Other critical readings might arrive at a similar hierarchy of characters, but reading the poem in relation to audible voice illuminates and intensifies the importance of the hierarchy, allowing readers to better appreciate the characters' richness and complexity. In this light, a more complete treatment of the theme of audible voice would include

an analysis of the angelic voices of Raphael, Michael, Abdiel, Uriel, and Gabriel; the demonic voices of Beelzebub, Moloch, Mammon, and Belial; and the voices of Sin and Death. The intricacies of these characters would undoubtedly be augmented by examining how their spoken voices function in the poem's vocal hierarchy and how they relate not only to God, the Son, Satan, Adam and Eve, but also to one another.

The theme of audible voice becomes most poignant when we remember that the blind Milton spoke *Paradise Lost* into the world. Enveloped in darkness, his eyes "roll[ing] in vain" after light (3.23), Milton must have had the strange sense, at one time or another, that he was playing the role of God as he spoke his poem into the abyss. It is fitting that "voice" becomes one of the primary ways that he conveys, in his magnificent creation, the human potential to rise above difficulty and rejoin God.

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