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Purpose Found:
**Conditions of Meaningful Existence, Selfhood and the Role of
the Other in John Milton's *Paradise Lost***

**Anna Sawch
Honors Thesis
2011
Tutor: Elizabeth Sagaser
Second Reader: Emily Kugler**

**Stand fast! To stand or fall
Free in thine own arbitrement it lies**

*To Elizabeth Sagaser, who in conversation(s) has solaced my defects and as allowed
my mind to be its own place*

*To my family: So forcible within my heart I feel the bond of nature draw me to my
own.*

Lastly, to Milton, for being a true poet and of the devil's party without knowing it.

**Love refines
The thoughts and heart enlarges**

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Introduction

While Biblical interpretations of Genesis posit God as omnipotent creator and teacher, in John Milton's *Paradise Lost* it is Adam and Eve's relationship and interactions with one another that make them who they are and mold them into who they become. The Adam and Eve of *Paradise Lost* are true characters, and dynamic ones at that. Rather than serve an allegory or work to create a lofty moral lesson, Adam and Eve grow through speech, desire, and language, interfacing with one another in the spirit of true human curiosity and self-discovery. I first explored this observation that Milton's Adam and Eve are more restricted by God than they are created by him in a paper for my British Literary History class, in which I examined conditions of meaningful existence for the characters in *Paradise Lost* and came to the conclusion that for Adam and Eve, existence is only worthwhile when they have each other. Here I argue that in fact Adam and Eve's experiences of and with each other ultimately create their senses of self.

Adam is not merely "lonely" as Mary Nyquist suggests in her essay "Gendered Subjectivity in *Paradise Lost*," he is incomplete until he has Eve (512). He cannot know true "happiness," "delight" or feel fully formed without another who reflects back to him the impact of his own actions and words (8. 365,391). At the same time, Eve awakens to the realities of her own human self and nature as a female, perceiving herself through her interactions with Adam and defining her role in Eden for herself rather than through God's instructions. Essentially, by interacting with one another, Adam and Eve create a mirroring dynamic that allows them to see how much more similar they are to each other than they are to God. Yet this alignment also illuminates their differences as individuals,

allowing them to form autonomous senses of selves that are ultimately brought together not through ignorance or blind obedience but through the authenticity of human love.

It was William Blake in his poem “The Marriage of Heaven and Hell,” who first inspired my interest in and eventual love of *Paradise Lost*. Not only does Blake illuminate the seductively subversive nature of Milton’s poetry, but he also forces us to acknowledge that we inevitably align ourselves with our fellow humans in the epic. Why is it that Milton’s God is over-determined in his reign over paradise? Milton’s God works to protect Adam and Eve in a sheltered, naïve paradise of Eden, while simultaneously offering the tree of knowledge as a sort of test to resist temptation and obey His rules, only to realize that the human tendency to learn, explore, and change is unavoidable. Adam and Eve’s resistance to God’s unexplained edicts and restraints illuminates their penchant for curiosity and auto-didacticism rather than “forc’d hallelujahs” (II. 243). Superficially, the Genesis accounts of creation seem to vilify Adam and Eve, and in particular, Eve, depicting them as ungrateful and disobedient. Milton’s Adam and Eve are fully realized humans who subscribe to a different set of rules entirely: the society and culture they ultimately come to adhere to is the one they create through and for each other. William Blake claimed in his poem that Milton was “a true Poet, and of the Devil's party without knowing it,” a sentiment that alludes to Milton’s ability, through his poetic interrogation of Biblical conventions and traditional perspectives, to re-imagine Genesis through a more humanistic lens. Through Milton’s radical vision of Adam and Eve, he offers an imagination of humanity’s beginning characterized less by the omnipotence of God and more by the power of humankind.

Today, with developments like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Flickr, how we define ourselves for others becomes more a product of modern technology, popular culture, and mass influence than one another on a direct level. Yet while these cultural influences did not exist in Eden, there are more similarities between the imagined first of our kind and us modern readers. In fact, while our interactions with one another today are often guised through the calculated medium of technology, they represent the same sort of mirroring dynamic that Adam and Eve engage in in their discoveries of self and other. It is interesting to note how adeptly Milton spans the chasm of time between past and present, bringing to light certain human universalities, actions, and choices, like curiosity, doubt, and imperfection, that are impossible for us to deny or disagree with. Milton's use of characterization in particular works to create this transcendence: his Adam and Eve resist the stagnant nature of Eden and its rules, questioning God, themselves, and each other in a way that both differentiates them from their father God and allows them to develop as independent characters.

How do Adam and Eve align themselves to one another?

Initially in the text, it is God who defines who Adam and Eve are both individually and to one another. In creating Adam in His image and "not equal as their sex not equal seemed," Adam has "absolute rule" over Eve (IV. 296, 301). Essentially, God relegates the pair to a hierarchy of intellect and gendered authority. However, as Adam and Eve interact, they recognize in each other a common substance, not merely their shared physical origins, but a link of common humanity that binds them to each other. Furthermore, it becomes clear throughout the epic that the more equal bond Adam and Eve share as husband and wife supercedes their filial bond to God. In this thesis, I

seek to explore fully how this shared link draws Adam and Eve closer together and away from God. Moreover, I examine what this essential magnetism of humanity to itself suggests about the nature of God's relationship to Adam and Eve, obedience, and the idea of Paradise itself. Why, despite the fact that God is perfect, omnipotent, and omniscient, do Adam and Eve feel that, by the end of the epic, they are more important to each other than God is to them? Adam and Eve undoubtedly love God, and the pair feels sadness and shame when God questions the two about their disobedience. However, despite their sadness in losing paradise, the couple does not ever voice regret. Instead, they actualize their solidarity to one another by taking hands and making their "solitary way" out of Eden together (12.649). In this final scene of the epic, Adam and Eve's loyalty and importance to one another is especially manifest as they come to the revelation that, contrary to all that they have learned from heaven, true paradise is anywhere that the other is.

In this alignment, what does it mean to be a human "reflection" of each other?

Despite their ultimate obedience to each other over God, Adam and Eve's unique engagement and attraction to one another does in fact begin with their immortal Father. When Eve first wakes after her creation, the first human contact she has is with herself, and in seeing her reflection in a pool, she is immediately attracted to what she does not yet know is her own image. In fact, this "smooth, watery image" detains her until God leads her to Adam. Upon seeing each other, Adam and Eve know they are of the same kind, but not identical, and throughout my thesis, I look to explore how they come to not just recognize their physical differences but also their intellectual, emotional and metaphysical differences as well. The mirroring dynamic the two engage in allows them

to not just find solidarity in their own kind but also to recognize their differences and unique features as individuals. In this way, not only do Adam and Eve come to understand the difference between themselves and God, but in the imperfect reflection the two offer one another, they recognize what defines them as autonomous beings in a way that shapes their senses of self. Just as Adam is to Eve upon their first meeting, Eve too is as a mirror to Adam. Instead of offering him an image of his perfect yet inferior counterpart, however, her reactions to him instead offer a unique reflection his impact on her, and through seeing Eve's responses to him, he comes to understand how much power he really has over her emotions. In regards to this mirroring dynamic, not only do I want to examine the idea of reflection, and how viewing one's self through simulacrum affects the meaning of experience, but also analyze and explore how the judgments and opinions of the other impact Adam and Eve's development as humans. That is to say, through watching each other Adam and Eve come to understand who they are, what they are capable of, and what their capabilities mean as independent selves. Ultimately, Adam and Eve over time come to see themselves through each other's eyes rather than Gods in a way that sheds valuable light on what it means for them to be human.

How do Adam and Eve come to define each other exactly?

While many critics in addition to me have noted the bond between Adam and Eve supercedes their respective relationships to God, the reasons for this superior bond have not been fully explored. Why is this bond powerful enough to lead them to disobey God? Such a disobedience for the sake of being with each other obviously poses a lot of risk for the couple who, although "free," are still totally subservient to the will and wishes of God (3. 124). In order to fully explore this question, I examined the trajectory of Adam and

Eve's relationship with one another as it becomes more complex and mutually reliant, noting how their senses of selfhood become more predicated on their interactions with one another and how in understanding their similarities as humans, they recognize how they differ from God. Inevitably, there comes a point in Adam and Eve's development that their loyalty shifts, but does this moment come after their temptation to eat of the Tree of Knowledge or before? Throughout the epic, Adam and Eve refuse to admit that their allegiance is to anyone but God, but by the end of the epic and after their fall, Adam and Eve see God as "wise,/ though threatening" and question God's authority believing it "not well conceived of God who though His power/ Creation could repeat yet would be loath Us to abolish" (9. 938-9, 945-7). Instead, Adam and Eve together "are one" and realize that they "cannot be severed" from each other, in a way that suggests they can however be separate from God by disobeying him together, and while they never stop loving God, their shift in loyalty is much more subtle and subconscious (9.958).

This newfound psychological and emotional independence from the rules of Heaven is partially manifest in Adam and Eve's passionate love for one another, but it is also actualized through their re-organization of gender roles, and through their desire to understand who they are as individuals. Part of the reason that Raphael scoffs at Adam for being so infatuated with Eve is because Raphael wants Eve to "acknowledge" Adam as "her head" and not the other way around as Adam suggests (8. 574). Adam and Eve interrogate their sense of gender hegemony through their unexpected sensations of attraction, happiness and companionship. Essentially, Adam and Eve culture their allegiance for one another subconsciously, thus suggesting to us its inevitability and testifying to humanity's ability to define itself.

What does it mean to be a creator?

In distinguishing themselves as human, Adam and Eve, as I have mentioned, impact each other's formation in a myriad of ways. They are as much creators as Milton's God is, and in being so, they force us to interrogate what it really means to create. In both Biblical renditions of Genesis as well as Milton's epic, God is the Supreme Creator who physically actualizes the universe and all its contents. However, Adam and Eve develop the significance of their physical surroundings on a metaphysical, subjective level. That is, as they create how Eden means as much as God has created *what* Eden is, they illuminate an important divide between the objectivity of the physical realm and the subjectivity and flux of the emotional and figurative realm. This creative notion is also applicable to Adam and Eve themselves: just as God has made them *what* they are, they— through their decisions and interactions— create *how* they are.

It is useful to imagine this distinction between physical creation and individual interpretation through the metaphor of reading. In fact, the very act of reading or writing about *Paradise Lost* helps illuminate the difference: an author physically creates a book by writing the words on a page, but what those words actually mean for any one person (within the context of the mind and life of that person) and what the story actually means is a product of that individual, that reader. Thus, Adam and Eve, in their mutable and fallible immortality, create Eden into paradise for each other by defining it for themselves and not necessarily because God has told them it is so. In essence, the very act of being is creative, not an unfolding series of already-programmed thoughts and actions: it is the language that creates meaning in a text, not the author, and in *Paradise Lost*, Milton

merely places his first humans in Eden, and it they who take on lives and meanings of their own.

Humanity's Inclination to Humanity

Many scholars have noted Adam and Eve's inclination to one another throughout the progression of *Paradise Lost*, culminating in the final scene where Eve and Adam have the ultimate revelation that true paradise is anywhere the other is. It is my interest to explore *why* and how this bond happens, illuminating not just Adam and Eve's attraction to fellow humanity, but how this inclination, manifest through speech, desire, and perception, allows them to discover who they are as selves beyond the scope of who God has told them they are.

Adam and Eve are born into an Eden in which God is "law," and dictates how Adam and Eve must define themselves and each other (IV. 637). Yet God's definitions for Adam and Eve are simple: male and female, superior and inferior, in a way that underestimates the inevitable complexity of humanity and the mutable nature of selfhood. As Adam and Eve converse with and observe one another, they see their own similar and dissimilar qualities reflected, complicating their definitions of selfhood beyond God's conception. Although Adam and Eve love and respect God, His omniscience makes Him impossible to relate to. Thus Adam and Eve, equally human in their partnership, must create more definitions of mankind for one another that subvert God's and ultimately draw them a way from God and towards each other in a way that suggests humanity's inherent alignment with it's kind above all else. In hearing of their creation, Adam and Eve are aware that they are of the same flesh, but this understanding ultimately goes beyond God's physical extraction of Eve from Adam's ribcage. Even in their *substantial*

similarities (as well as their intangible ones), Adam sees Eve as a part of his metaphysical self, explaining in Book VII:

Bone of my Bone, Flesh of my Flesh, my self
 Before me; Woman is her Name, of Man
 Extracted (Book VII. 492-494)

In the suggestive enjambment of “my Self/ Before me,” Adam emphasizes that Eve is his “self,” before he even knows who that self is. Through Eve and his attraction to her, Adam has come to understand who he is and what his emotions, from happiness and admiration to “mistrust” and “suspicion”, actually mean to him in his life in Eden (IX. 1124). The phrase “before me” suggests that Eve has the latent power to bring about self-discovery and that power existed before he even tapped it through knowing her. Ultimately, it is as if Eve is key for selfhood, unlocking for Adam a more authentic awareness of who he is that he did not have on his own. In a sense, Adam and Eve are both an integrated unit of the same “flesh” and “bone” and yet autonomous individuals with distinct impressions of one another, and through the presence of one another, above God, they are able to find such self-definition and understanding.

Part of Adam’s understanding of self and who he is transcends the mere notion that he and Eve are human and mortally fallible, linking them by the fact that they will never be as perfect as their father, God. Adam and Eve see one another as completions of one another’s selves both literally and figuratively. Eve was literally “formed and fashioned” from Adam’s rib, and this sense of shared physicality evolves into a shared sense of personality and understanding of existence as well (Book VIII, 469). Adam explains his initial understanding of Eve to Raphael, stating:

Woman is her Name, of Man
 Extracted; for this cause he shall forgo

Father and Mother, and to his Wife adhere;
And they shall be one Flesh, one Heart, one Soul” (Book VIII. 496-9).

Even though Adam is told he is superior to Eve, he himself articulates that before and without Eve, he was not whole. If together Adam and Eve are “one Heart, one Soul” as Adam says, than without each other they are each merely half a heart and half a soul, and therefore incapable of really existing. For Adam, Eve has come from his body, his “heart” and his “soul;” in her she carries the genetics of his superiority, and thus, for him, God has also conferred upon Eve an agency and volition worthy of adherence. Further, Adam’s statement that he will “forgo Father and Mother, and to his Wife adhere” is a recognition that espousing himself to Eve is more worthy than procreation for the sake of expanding humanity. Adam sees his personal relation to Eve as her husband as more important than the high-order and more utilitarian concern of population, God’s original plan for the parents of humanity. Desire and love are not utilitarian. Adam demonstrates, and therein transcends the will of God, acting less like an imitation of God on earth and more like a fellow mortal we readers can relate to. It is Eve, through the agents of desire and love, who awakens Adam in every sense of the word.

In Adam’s acknowledgment of Eve being as much a part of him as he is himself, two things are clear: first, parenthood is second to partnership: being God’s substitute on earth is not as important to Adam as his unification with Eve; and second, Adam and Eve’s senses of selves are reliant on the presence of one another. One of the ways we as readers witness Adam and Eve’s attraction to and reliance on one another is through their speech. At the beginning of the epic, Adam and Eve’s speech patterns are unfamiliar and formal. In his essay “Satan and the Romantic Satan: A Notebook,” Kenneth Gross notes, “Adam’s first speech sounds oddly like something learned by rote, or like a bit of

preacherly ventriloquism” (423). Other scholars have also noted this evolution of speech as testimony to Adam and Eve’s departure from their status under God, yet I would like to expand on this observation and suggest that Adam’s and Eve’s speech development also testifies to their use of each other as a means of self-discovery. The evolution of Adam’s speech from recited to authentic, as Gross notes, illuminates the evolution of Adam’s selfhood from learned to understood and suggests his personal growth. In learning to speak more conversationally and colloquially through his dialogues with Eve, Adam (and likewise Eve) become more aware of their independent intellectual faculties. They can evolve beyond their originally assigned duties and come to exercise their independence through language. Moreover however, it is evident that that Adam has learned his recited, overly formal speech patterns from God, his infallible and omnipotent father, and Adam discovers he is a human (he is only in God’s image, not God himself), his true speech develops. Evidently, Adam and Eve engage in what Northrop Frye¹ calls “verbal play” (463). In speaking with one another, Adam and Eve are able to move past this “ventriloquism”. By playing with their language, the two ultimately come to understand how, despite being inferior to God, they do have a capability of their own and a capacity to expand on it, making them more aware of who they are and what they can do on their own.

¹ From Frye, Northrop. "The Garden Within." *The Return of Eden: Five Essays on Milton's Epics*. By Northrop Frye. Toronto: U of Toronto Press, 1965. 60-72, 98-103. Print.

Beyond their verbal play in a discovering sense, Adam and Eve's playfulness with language represents a departure from "the staleness of opinion"² that is God's law recited, to an understanding of their affinity to one another. Yet as much as Adam and Eve recognize their undeniable compatibility with each other rather than God, it is also Heaven itself that continuously reminds Adam and Eve of the separation between God and man in a way that pushes them further into the arms and authority of one another. In

Book VIII, Raphael says to Adam:

In what He gives to thee: this Paradise
And thy fair Eve. Heav'n is for thee too high
To know what passes there. Be lowly wise:
Think only what concerns thee and thy being.
Dream not of other worlds, what creatures there
Live in what state, condition or degree
Contented that thus far hath been revealed
Not of earth only but of highest Heav'n (Book VIII. 170-178).

Here Raphael denies Adam the ability to imagine ascendance or a higher selfhood and in doing so, he relegates Adam to the realm of mortality. In this way, it is no wonder that Adam and Eve come to be far more inclined to humanity than heaven: how could they not when such higher thoughts are prohibitive and futile? At the same time, Raphael attempts the impossible task of fettering Adam's personal growth. Through his commands of "Joy thou in", "Think only", "dream not", and "live in", Raphael is essentially confining Adam's ability to expand his perspective physically and metaphysically. Heaven, while creative, is equally as prohibitive, and its prohibitions drive Adam and Eve not necessarily to directly disobey God's law, but to have more faith

² Frye, Northrop. "The Garden Within." *The Return of Eden: Five Essays on Milton's Epics*. By Northrop Frye. Toronto: U of Toronto Press, 1965. 60-72, 98-103. Print.

in one another and their ability to grow together. In this sense, not only does Adam and Eve's departure from their parentage, manifest through their speech, testify to the difference between God and man, but also to the ever-changing and ever-mutable nature of the self.

Throughout the epic, Adam, as God's substitute, is caught between divine parentage and mortal companionship, pulled between the deity he never will be and the human he already is. He is caught between the responsibility to adhere to the lofty responsibilities of acting for God under His shadow and the desire to follow the allure of human curiosity. This schism is particularly evident in the aftermath of Adam and Eve's temptation, where rather than apologizing for their stray from divine guidance, Adam blames Eve just as she tries to fault him. Instead of taking the mature, leadership position, Adam takes the more fallibly human one. When Christ arrives in the garden soon after, he questions Adam's ability to live up to his superior distinction. In Book X, He asks Adam about his blame of Eve:

Was shee thy God, that her thou didst obey
 Before his voice? Or was shee made thy guide,
 Superior, or but equal, that to her
 Thou did'st resigne thy Manhood and the Place
 Wherein God set thee above her made of thee,
 And for thee, whose perfection farr excell'd
 Hers in all real dignitie (Book X. 145-51).

Here, Adam's inclination to follow Eve suggests his desire to follow humanity and its impulses rather than the expectations of God, which are much harder to meet, and Christ sees this. Adam has followed Eve, a human, because he relates to her and her expectations more so than he does to God's. God is perfect and infallible, Adam is necessarily (and knowingly) imperfect, and thus he is attracted to Eve's similar fallibility.

In choosing to follow Eve's lead, we see Adam making a conscious movement away from his Divine parenthood and towards a more autonomously formed selfhood. In essence, Adam aligns himself with Eve without explicitly saying so, or with a conscious realization of his choice at all. His inclination to Eve is a sort of inverse transcendence, moving beyond the divine and extending and existing in the mortal realm.

Furthermore, Christ asks Adam, "Thou did'st resigne thy Manhood," yet the question is less rhetorical than Christ's chiding tone suggests. Evidently, Christ's idea of manhood is different than Adam's; Adam is redefining masculinity on his own terms as he discovers his selfhood. Christ tells Adam that the drama of the fall could have been avoided had Adam "known thyself aright", yet Adam can never know himself "aright" if he only knows himself on God's terms (Book X. 155-6). Essentially, Milton's Christ represents a conventional view of masculinity and the pressures that create gendered stereotypes. Through Adam's punishable act of obeying Eve, it is clear that Adam cannot be told who he is; he has to learn his self for himself, and, as we know, the idea of selfhood is malleable. For Adam to allow God to tell him who he is would make him a superficial and inauthentic person, and as we watch Christ try to hold Adam to this caricature, we see how far Adam has moved towards a more authentic and fully formed self.

After their stray from the rules of God and subsequent "fall" (I use the quotations here because I would like to later examine the true outcome of Adam and Eve's enlightenment), Adam and Eve are quick to cast blame on each other. Yet the subtext of their actions is more positive than their actions suggest. Ironically, because Adam and Eve clearly believe each other capable of fault and manipulation, it is evident that they

follow each other more than the rules of Heaven. In his essay, “The Fall”, C.S. Lewis asks, “What would have happened if instead of his ‘compliance bad’ Adam had scolded or even chastised Eve and then interceded with God on her behalf” (Lewis, 454). If Adam had chastised Eve he would not be human. Instead he laments, “what could I more?” suggesting that as a mortal, he could have done nothing else but fall with Eve, for to have done more would have been to deny his place as a part of her world and a part of humanity (Book IX. 1169). If Adam had chosen to chastise or scold Eve, he would have been ignoring his own fallibility, a vital aspect of his role as one of the founders of mankind rather than upholding an illusory standard of his Godhead on earth. Being angry at someone rather than being disappointed in someone suggests a more egalitarian relationship. By being angry at her, Adam places himself on the same plane as Eve, suggesting that she is far more equal to him than God had planned. Despite God’s unseen insistence that Eve is inferior to Adam, Adam’s anger ironically assigns her more power than God assigns her. Moreover, if Adam had chosen to play God and scold Eve it ultimately would have been a rejection of his understanding of his own humanity.

Furthermore, despite many critics’ insistence that Eve, unlike Adam, is unable to stand alone without her male counterpart, Eve is a being capable of persuasion and agency. This is evident not only to Adam who, in his vehement blame and anger towards Eve, insists that she had successfully manipulated him, but to Christ as well. In her essay “Eve and the Doctrine of Responsibility in *Paradise Lost*,” Stella P. Revard comments on the Son’s disappointment in Eve, stating:

The Son’s indictment of Eve would seem to imply that, although she had not stood, she had been capable of so doing and thus was liable to punishment as an

independent being... Adam has argued that Eve had 'caused' him to sin and therefore was in a way 'responsible' for his sin (Revard, 71)

Despite being told she is inferior to Adam, Eve is willing to accept her responsibility, and clearly, the Son is willing to confer that responsibility on her. In doing so, He acknowledges that she is capable of independent action. In Adam and Eve's blaming of each other for the fall, they seem to admit that they— as opposed to Satan— were responsible for the fall and are responsible for themselves still. In Book X, in response to Eve's temptation, Adam proclaims that Eve, in her seemingly perfect nature, did not appear at least initially capable of their downfall, stating:

So Divine,
That from her hand I could suspect no ill,
And what she did, whatever in itself,
Her doing seem'd to justify the deed;
Shee gave me of the Tree, and I did eat. (Book X, 137-43)

Significantly, Adam's "I could suspect" suggests that Eve has acted in a way contrary to how she was told she must act, contrary to the God-given behavior she is supposed to have. By contradicting the self that God has told her she is by acting differently, it clear that Eve is both an individual capable of making independent choice and that she is a true self, evolving, changing and thinking on her own.

Also, it is significant to note that the real "turning point"³ in *Paradise Lost* is when Adam and Eve blame one another for Eve's decision to work separately, as opposed to when Satan convinces her to eat the apple. Chapter two of Genesis in the

³Revard, Stella P. "Eve and the Doctrine of Responsibility in Paradise Lost." *PMLA* 88.1 (1973): 69-78. Print.

Biblical Old Testament ends with Adam and Eve both naked and “not ashamed.”⁴ Chapter 3 begins with the serpent tempting Eve. There is no explanation of what takes place between these moments where Adam and Eve decide to work separately, and because of this it is specifically Milton’s God that makes Adam and Eve capable of their own fall, illuminating, independent from the Bible’s authority, the power of human agency and the influence of the immediacy of human nature over ideology. That is to say, Adam and Eve see each other and not Satan as the root of their decision because they see in one another an influence stronger and more tangible than obedience. Not once does Eve lament that Satan is the root cause of her fall: instead, she quips to Adam, “Hadst thou been firm and fixed in thy dissent/ Neither had I transgressed nor thou with me” (Book X. 1160-1). While Eve here tries to deflect blame, she also is able to see how her actions subverted Adam’s alleged authority. Knowing this, she attacks his inability to impose that authority over her in a way that suggests she is fully cognizant of her position both as part of Adam and as an individual. Ultimately, Adam and Eve’s blame of one another suggests that through one another, they recognize their faults and irresponsibility, and therein also see they have responsibility and capability; they recognize in their dynamic with one another the expectations they have of themselves.

So Adam and Eve move away from God their father—for better and for worse. That is to say, is Adam and Eve’s choice to stray an act of gross ingratitude or courageous self-enfranchisement? Scholars contest this point, arguing either that Adam

⁴ *The Holy Bible*. King James Vers. *Electronic Text Center, University of Virginia Library*. University of Virginia Library, n.d. Web. 15 Feb. 2011. <<http://etext.virginia.edu/etcbin/toccernew2?id=KjvGene.sgm&images=images/modeng&data=/texts/english/modeng/parsed&tag=public&=2&division=div1>>.

and Eve are ashamed and degraded in their disobedience or awakened to their humanity⁵. On a surface level, Milton's Adam and Eve react to their disobedience in a way that plays into scriptural depictions by seeming amoral and degraded as they begin to "cast lascivious eyes" (IX. 1014). Feeling for the first time the drunken effect of desire, Adam says to Eve:

Eve, now I see thou art exact of taste
 And elegant of sapience no small part
 Since to each meaning savor we apply
 And palate call judicious. I the praise
 Yield thee, so well this day thou hast purveyed.
 Much pleasure we have lost while we abstained
 From this delightful fruit, nor known till now
 True relish tasting. (IX. 1017-24)

Yet while Adam and Eve soberly find themselves "naked left/ to guilty Shame" (IX. 1056-7), Adam's declaration "Eve, now I see" offers a surprisingly more forgiving view of the pair's choice to eat the apple, suggesting a revelation of truth and understanding. Adam "yields" directly to Eve, and acknowledges how much he and she have been denied and "lost" in the time they have "abstained" from the Tree of Knowledge. Only with their newfound knowledge of both good and bad does Adam find an equilibrium of truth, and in this moment, he realizes how incomplete his understandings and perceptions of life were. Furthermore, the pair recognizes God's denial of truth to Adam and Eve, and while they later wish to return to "innocence", "faith", and "purity" (IX. 1075), they don't hold any of these adjectives equal to truth. Instead, these words suggest that Adam and Eve have finally overcome a blindness and inexperience when they find "true relish" in

⁵ Bell, Millicent. "The Fallacy of the Fall in Paradise Lost." *PMLA* 68.4 (1953): 863-883. Print.

the apple. Truth comes at a heavy price, but in having this sense of truth, Adam and Eve liberate themselves from God and create true senses of humanity and self-understanding.

The act of sinning itself also serves as a form of liberation from God, and ultimately, it is also an act of self-discovery that links Adam and Eve more closely than before the “fall”. After all of their deflections of blame and denials of fault in front of God, Eve still turns to Adam and begs that he “forsake [her] not” and swears “What love sincere and reverence in my heart/ I bear thee” (X. 914, 915-16). Her declaration of sincerity comes after her acquisition of true knowledge of good and bad, and in knowing this distinction, her pleas become more authentic than if she still had not known the difference. Moreover, it is in front of Adam, rather than God, that Eve is truly honest about her role in their seeming degradation, and it is to Adam that she begs forgiveness. In front of God, Adam and Eve hide, and Adam, contrary to his authority over her, blames Eve, while Eve simply claims, “The serpent me beguiled and I did eat” (X. 162). Here with each other however, Adam and Eve are instead more truly honest with one another: they cry, they do not hide physically or emotionally from one another, and despite their initial separation and blame, they are more concerned with how the fall will affect their relationship with each other than with God.

What’s more, Eve further proclaims her dependence on Adam rather than God stating, “thy counsel, in this uttermost distress/ my only strength and stay!” (X. 920-21). Adam is Eve’s “only”: he, not God, is her respite, her comfort, and her assurance. Adam is as imperfect as Eve, and yet she turns to him in her distress because she sees herself as the “sole cause to [Adam] of all this woe” (X. 935). He, unlike God, is capable of depression and pain, and Eve knows she can hurt him in regrettable ways. It is as if it is

easier for Eve to defy God than to defy Adam because she can relate to the pain she causes Adam, making her feel a greater sense of solidarity with Adam and his humanity than with God and His perfection. Moreover, only through Adam can Eve imagine death. Or at least she tries to imagine how she will “subsist” “forlorn” of Adam (X. 921, 920). God’s promise of death as punishment for eating from the Tree of Life is a hollow threat to Adam and Eve who do not know the concept of death. Yet in falling— and in falling, awakening— Adam and Eve are able to conceptualize death as the loss of one another. In William Shakespeare’s sonnet, “When I have seen by Time’s fell hand defaced”, the speaker states at the end “this thought is as a death which cannot choose/ but weep to have that which it fears to lose”⁶. Like Shakespeare’s speaker, Adam and Eve see death not as a physical expiration of the body but as a more subjective, emotional loss of each other that destroys their self and the sense of being they have created in each other’s eyes.

| In Paradise, to lose the other is ultimately to lose the self.

⁶ Shakespeare, William. "Sonnet 64 ." *Shakespeare's Sonnets*. Ed. Stephen Booth. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000. N. pag. Print.

Gender Roles in Paradise

Eve is a physical part of Adam and was made for him, so, as God declares, she must “obey” him (IV. 636). Yet, Adam feels a more than metaphysical bond to Eve that complicates his role as her superior. Although he was told he is to have authority over Eve, she creates “an awe/ about her” that startles Adam into a more submissive role (VIII. 558). The realities of Adam and Eves’ conversations and the tangibility of their desires unexpectedly outweigh God’s laws and the hierarchy of femaleness and maleness that He establishes. Even still, after their fall Adam and Eve quickly and blindly, albeit temporarily, regress into the roles of chastising male superior and helpless, guiltless female in a way that validates much of the existing commentary on Eve’s subordination⁷. And yet, Adam’s admonishing of “ingrateful Eve” is short-lived and weak, done more out of fear of God than genuine anger. This fearful remonstrance, moreover, belies Adam’s ultimate inability to have ever controlled Eve: in his fear, Adam comes to understand that not only has he never controlled Eve, but in fact, has been “upbraided” by her total persuasion and intellect (X. 1164, 1168). Additionally, Adam and Eve do ultimately move past their guilty anger to the understanding that Paradise is only Paradise when they are with each other. In this conviction [understanding, insight, declaration], they reveal their very real, human alignment with, and allegiance to, each other. In essence, despite the fact that God establishes the female Eve as subordinate to Adam, Adam and Eve’s instinctual, human engagements over-ride and negate God’s plan for male superiority and authority in Paradise and make Eve as much of a self as Adam is.

⁷ Mary Nyquist’s “The Genesis of Gendered Subjectivity in the Divorce Tracts and in Paradise Lost; Julia Walker’s “Eve: The First Reflection”. See Works Cited and Bibliography

Adam and Eve are drawn to one another, but is the attraction evenly balanced? Just as many scholars have noted the inclination of humanity to itself in *Paradise Lost*, many have also examined the role of gender in Paradise, staking claims that range from lauding Eve's feminine power to deriding Miltonic misogyny. In her examination of Eve's first self-encounter, author Julia M. Walker references the "gendered geography of Eden" claiming that Eve "neither recognizes nor names herself"—a disconnect that prevents her self-actualization (516). While Walker is not alone in her feminist reading of Eden, and while it is not my goal to contest the hegemony of gender that God establishes in Paradise, I would like to offer a supplementary reading of Adam and Eve's gendered interactions in the context of the entire epic (as opposed to select scenes) to demonstrate how Adam and Eve mutually value each other. Walker and others make the assertion that Eve is unable to know herself independently of Adam; I argue the very fact that Eve's self-knowledge is based on the presence of another does not indicate her subordination but her *interdependence*⁸. In their participatory "fellowship," Adam and Eve understand all experience and their own selves through the reflective, two-way lens of the other (VIII. 389). Through their perceptions of one another, Adam and Eve create a mirroring dynamic in which they see the impact of their singular choices, and the meaning of their shared experiences, through the refraction and reflection of their action on one another.

In the first description of Adam and Eve, Milton's speaker explains: "He for God only, she for God in him" (IV. 299). Eve, described as "for God in him", is to Adam

⁸ Mary Nyquist's "The Genesis of Gendered Subjectivity in the Divorce Tracts and in *Paradise Lost*"; Julia Walker's "Eve: The First Reflection". See Works Cited and Bibliography

what Adam is to God. Eve is Adam's charge, and Adam her "guide and head," as God's will declares (IV. 442). In those nascent moments, Adam and Eve do not know themselves and thus accept this imbalanced relation to one another. They are human beings come into life at fully grown, adult stages physically, yet they have not had the opportunity to know themselves, let alone each other. In this vein, Eve is aware and accepting of this gendered power structure in her first few days, and proclaims to Adam: "God is thy law, thou mine. To know no more/ is Woman's happiest knowledge and her praise" (IV. 637-8). Eve's initial understanding of self conveys a perspective that she departs from throughout the course of the epic. Here, her use of "Woman's" and "her," as opposed to personal pronouns, significantly suggests that how she believes she should feel is a projection of her understanding of the gender hierarchy that God has imparted on them. As she comes to see how the restrictions and expectations of this gender ideology affect and limit her sense of self, she removes this impersonal layer of convention from her personal beliefs, desiring a more personal understanding of her role in Paradise and in Adam's life.

Yet even before Eve discerns who she truly is versus what are the merely fictitious aspects of her sex, it is actually Adam who first sees through God's constructions of gender to Eve's true value. Initially, upon knowing how and why she was created, Eve says to Adam, "O thou for whom/ and from whom I was formed flesh of thy flesh" (IV. 440-1). In her words there is a sense of true indebtedness to Adam: without him, the male, she, the female, is to "no end" and feels the weight of the fact that without Adam, she would not exist (IV. 442). And at first, it seems that Adam echoes this sentiment when he declares, "To give thee being I lent/ Out of my side to thee" (IV.

483). Adam tells Eve he “lent” her a rib, as opposed to fully giving it to her. On one hand, his language suggests an obligation on Eve’s part to repay the favor or at least to acknowledge his sacrifice with submissive and obedient gratitude. However, immediately after this statement Adam goes on to explain to Eve: “Part of my soul I seek thee and thee claim/ My other half” (IV. 487-8). It is apparent that Adam is not asking Eve to repay him but is instead suggesting that, in lending her his rib, he must spend his life seeking Eve always, because she is the part of him, physically and emotionally, that is missing. Had Adam fully given Eve the rib as opposed to “lending” it, their transaction would be final. In this way, Adam and Eve are bound: God has made two bodies of one substance, and ultimately, that substantial bond is stronger than their physical separation because they are, above all else, “both one soul” (VIII. 604).

Furthermore, Adam signals his acceptance of Eve as his equal through more than just an acknowledgement of their physical connection. When reiterating to Raphael how he first explained his need for a companion to God, Adam explains:

“Among unequals what society
Can sort, what harmony or true delight,
Which must be mutual in proportion due
Given and received?” (VIII.383-388).

God asks Adam why the lower beasts are inadequate companions for him when Adam can share their language, to which Adam explains that these lowly beasts are “unequals”. Instead, Adam explains, he needs a companion “mutual in proportion” in order to have “true delight” and “harmony”. In Adam’s acceptance of Eve as a worthy, if not totally adored companion, he makes it clear that she is adequately “mutual in proportion” and is indeed equal, despite God making her inferiorly “for God in him” (IV. 299). Unlike man, God is “Best with Thyself”— He does not need an the backdrop of a companion to fully

experience His existence (VIII. 428). But “Not so is Man/ But in degree, the cause of his desire/ By conversation with his like to help/ Or solace his defects.” (VIII. 416-419). As Adam had explained to Raphael, God does not need a companion like he does because God is perfect. Yet Adam, who is unsure of who he is and quite malleable needs an equal other to converse with and help “solace his defects”. Having Eve as a companion rectifies Adam’s self-doubts, or at least makes him forget them in a way that not only supercedes God’s explanations of Adam’s life, power, and purpose in Eden but illustrates how Adam equalizes Eve as much emotionally as he does physically.

Adam also articulates the need for an other as a means to feel complete, reiterating the ability of a human companion to ratify the gaps that God left when He made the first two human beings (VIII. 428). As I have stated, “conversation” is the remedy for Adam’s ignorant solitude and uncertainty. While scholars argue that Adam knows himself in a way that Eve does not⁹, I would like to contest that Adam’s knowledge of who he is, based on who God has told him he is, is far more illusory and inauthentic than the self he becomes through being with Eve. Conversation is an inherently social interaction, and it is only through these social interactions with a companion equal (and no greater nor no less) in faculty that Adam can “help or solace his defects”. Unlike God, Adam is not sufficient to stand alone at the top, forever “sufficiently possessed/ of happiness”; for that type of realness of emotion he needs Eve (VIII. 404-405).

⁹ Mary Nyquist’s “The Genesis of Gendered Subjectivity in the Divorce Tracts and in Paradise Lost; Julia Walker’s “Eve: The First Reflection”. See Works Cited and Bibliography

Additionally, Adam himself gives voice to the discrepancy between his self as God's substitute and the far more different self he becomes through Eve:

But here
 Far otherwise: transported I behold,
 Transported touch. Here passion first I felt,
 Commotion strange! In all enjoyments else
 Superior and unmoved, here only weak
 Against the charm of beauty's powerful glance" (VIII. 529-533).

It is only around Eve that Adam feels weak, otherwise, he is "superior and unmoved," and thus, only through Eve is Adam moved or self-aware of his own emotional limits. In his authentic emotions, one of which is doubt, Adam signals a sense of self-awareness and his distance from God—a change provoked only by the presence of Eve. Thus, without Eve Adam would be unaware of his deficiencies, weaknesses, and his emotions at all. As Adam explains, "In solitude/ What happiness? Who can enjoy alone/ Or all enjoying what contentment find?" (VIII.364-5). Unlike his satisfactorily solitary parent, Adam cannot know true happiness "in solitude"; for humankind, enjoyment and contentment, strength and weakness, are emotions and perceptions that must necessarily be shared in order to be fully real. Adam is only aware of his own self and the emotions that possess him because of he is with Eve, and thus, Eve's presence testifies to the notion that while Adam can physically subsist alone, there can be no meaning to his selfhood or feelings without his sympathetic other to help him realize it.

Moreover, despite the fact that God made Eve of and for Adam, the pair's gendered power imbalance not only equalizes itself throughout the course of the epic but at times is even reversed. God planned for Adam to be in control of Eve, and yet Adam clearly deviates from this plan in his total adoration of her. When Adam explains his feelings for Eve to Raphael, Raphael responds with "contracted brow", exemplifying how

Adam has accepted Eve far more eagerly and equally than God had originally intended (VIII. 560). Raphael's skepticism towards Adam's feelings about Eve negates the critical commentary that takes God's hierarchical positioning of Adam and Eve at face value: if Raphael, an agent of God's will, is concerned about Adam's choices, then clearly Adam and Eve have the faculty to make their own decisions and grow their own ways. The couple's emotional deviation from God's will illuminates just how subject Adam and Eve are to desire, a human feeling that totally supercedes God-stated reason. Furthermore, when Eve suggests that she and Adam work separately in the garden, Adam replies, "to a short absence I could yield" (IX. 248). His reply that he could "yield" reverses the power dynamic between he and Eve. Initially, she is the one who "yielded with coy submission," but now it is Adam who is doing the yielding, subordinating himself to Eve by a volition that is tellingly and totally his rather than God's (IV. 410).

God himself even notices recognizes how the clear-cut gender hierarchy between Adam and Eve that He establishes fails to take hold. After Adam and Eve's temptation, God, in an effort to punish Eve, declares: "to thy husband's will/ Thine shall submit: he over thee shall rule" (X. 196). Earlier in Book IV, Milton's speaker explains that Adam and Eve are "not equal as their sex not equal seemed": God Created Eve "for" Adam, and Adam has "absolute rule" over Eve and the rest of Eden (IV. 296, 299, 301). If Adam has "absolute rule" over everything from his conception, why is God telling Eve *after* her fall that Adam has rule over her? Shouldn't he have been ruling over her all along? Inevitably, Adam and Eve ignore God's original edict, driven by their uncontrollable and superior forces of desire and mutual understanding. Intoxicated by Eve's charm and her appearance of total autonomy, Adam cannot reinforce the gendered hierarchy and

“absolute rule” of maleness in Paradise. Male superiority may be God’s ideal for gender in Paradise, yet ultimately, Eve’s growth as a self, independent of God’s definition for her, supercedes God, Adam, and patriarchal power in paradise, equalizing Eden in spite of God himself.

Eve’s growth, as I mention above, is particularly evident in her rationalization of her temptation by Satan. After eating the fateful apple, Eve, like Adam, departs from her role as obedient wife that God told her she must be, becoming a more learned individual who is influenced more by Adam and her perception of him than by God and her obedience to Him. She, before true knowledge even takes hold, questions her role as Adam’s inferior and is more concerned about how knowledge will affect her relationship with Adam than with God. In her uncertainty, Eve wonders:

Shall I to him make known
 As yet my change and give him to partake
 Full happiness with me? Or rather not,
 But keep the odds of knowledge in my pow’r
 Without copartner so to add what wants
 In female sex, the more to draw his love
 And render me more equal, and perhaps,
 A thing not undesirable, and sometime
 Superior: for inferior who is free?” (IX. 816-24).

Eve recognizes her inferiority and is conscious of her position’s limitations against the benefits of her partner’s superiority. Acknowledging not just her own standing but Adam’s as well, she sees how their standings as individuals function in their shared dynamic. Moreover, here Eve distinguishes her old self, the inferior self, from her “change”—the new self that she her self has catalyzed and actualized by choosing to eat the apple. The apple is merely the agent of her new knowledge; the decision to eat it was one of the few decisions she makes entirely autonomously and symbolizes her

independent agency. She also rationalizes her decision to take the apple, noting her captivity in inferiority and voicing a desire to be equal that is singularly hers. As an independent self with knowledge, she will have “full happiness”— a totality of emotion that she cannot experience as subordinate. In essence, Eve’s questioning of whether or not to share her knowledge, and then her ultimate decision to do so, illuminates how it is Adam, rather than God, who influences her thought processes, yet at the same time, her ability to make decisions on her own and rationalize her choices testifies to the validity of Eve as an autonomous female self.

Despite Eve’s independent rationale and decision-making ability, scholars continue to argue that her thought process only further testifies to how fully her identity is predicated on Adam. It is in this line of criticism that we must re-examine Eve’s confrontation of Adam after their fall. After being chastised by God, Eve turns to Adam and proclaims, “Was I t’have never parted from thy side?/ As good have grown there still a lifeless rib!” (IX. 1153-4). Here, Eve acknowledges her movement away from Adam, away from her status as “she for God in him” and as inferior to Adam because she came from him (IV. 299). Her use of the word “lifeless” suggests a vivification of self and body that is not necessarily physical— after all, she could walk, talk, and breathe because God made it so— but is intellectual, emotional, and psychological (IX. 1153-4). “Life”, versus “lifelessness”, is more than physical animation, it is an understanding of true emotions as dictated by personal volition and a sense of self rather than mere imitation and compliance. Moreover, by questioning her attachment to Adam, she sees the emptiness of a life based solely on another person. Here, and in her rationale to share her knowledge with Adam after eating the apple, it is clear that Eve is aware of the imposed

limitations of her femaleness. In her justification for personal growth to Adam, it is more than clear that Eve is becoming the self that she has endeavored to be, a self that needs Adam and loves Adam, but is created as much for herself as for him.

Yet even as established individuals in terms of capability, Adam and Eve are still heavily reliant on one another to understand and experience what it means to really be in Eden. Adam juxtaposes himself with Eve through his perceptions of her, and in doing so, he sees his differences and builds a sense of self-perception based on these discrepancies:

Or nature failed in me and left some part
 Not proof enough such object to sustain
 Or from my side subducting took perhaps
 More than enough, at least on her bestowed
 Too much ornament, in outward show
 Elaborate, of inward less exact (VIII. 534-9)

Adam knows, as God has told him, that he is superior in “inward faculties” to Eve, yet here, in the company of Eve, he doubts “nature” and the authority of his creation over hers (VIII. 552). In wondering if God has taken “too much” from him to make Eve, is Adam suggesting that God has erred? By comparing himself to God, it is obvious for Adam to see his own flaws and differences, as he measures himself against the backdrop of Divine infallibility and perfection. However, the differences, and similarities, that Adam sees between himself and Eve are far more complex and “less exact” and require more thoughtful contemplation. In questioning whether or not his Maker has “failed,” Adam is also wondering if Eve has “more than enough” intelligence, beauty and capability in a way that subverts God’s edicts and order. In company with Eve, Adam comes to see where he, who resembles “His image” more than Eve, is weak, and only through his fellow humanity does he see the entirety of his being. In this scene, it is Eve who is divine to Adam, not God, and ultimately, his reversal of divinity and humanity

suggests how necessary Adam and Eve are to each other's ability to feel like a fully-formed self.

While Adam imbues Eve with an ornamental supremacy, many critics of the gender interplay in *Paradise Lost* accurately note Eve's actual, more desperate need to be with Adam, even in death. When faced with the notion of being replaced by another after her presumed death, Eve proclaims:

Then I shall be no more
And Adam wedded to another Eve
Shall live with her enjoying, I extinct:
A death to think! (IX. 827-30)

For Adam, Eve may contain all of "what seemed fair in the world," yet for her the companionship is as necessary as it is romantic (VIII. 472). In Eve's case, it is a legitimate "death to think" about life without Adam, without the one on whom she has formed her sense of self. And in picturing her replacement, Eve imagines "another Eve," as if she is a clone in a series of women that all bear the same name and same alignment to Adam. It is here that I must return to the earlier examination of Eve post-fall in her allusion to the "lifeless rib" (IX. 1154). As seen earlier, it is apparent that Eve does eventually grow up, but it is only after she has been tempted. Her fall and disobedience marks a change in Eve that not only disavows her subservience to God but to Adam as well. In doing so, she is able to break the fetters of gendered submission and come to see herself as the mother of humanity rather than as a replaceable female counterpart.

Yet Eve initially does not believe in herself or give herself the same credit that Adam does. Before Adam ever knew Eve as a true self he was convinced of her perfection and was drawn to her in a way that she did not fully reciprocate initially. In describing first seeing Eve, not only does Adam feel overwhelmed by her loveliness and

doubt his superiority and strength against the charms of her beauty, he sees her as a more complete person than he sees himself (VIII. 533):

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.
 All higher knowledge in her presence falls
 Degraded. Wisdom in discourse with her
 Loses discount'nanced and like folly shows (VIII. 546-553).

Based on God's definitions, Eve is supposedly inferior, yet when Adam observes Eve based solely on his perceptions rather than God's influence, he sees her as being "wisest, virtuousest, discreetest, best". Before Adam even knows Eve she "seems" "so absolute" and "herself complete" that Adam is intimidated, and loses the ability to reason as his knowledge "falls". Although Adam has been told he is superior, once he physically experiences Eve for himself, such prescriptions of hierarchy are futile, and it is only through a more personal, kinesthetic knowledge of Eve that Adam sees his real place by her side. His use of the word "seems"—a word that conveys a subjectivity of perception and is vaguely illusory—is also telling not just of Eve but of Adam as well. The way Eve "seems" is meant to suggest that Adam's perception is not necessarily the reality, for she too has doubts by his side, but the fact that Eve "seems" "best" in his presence speaks to Adam's impressionable nature as well. "Higher knowledge," the knowledge Adam has from God about who he is in the world "falls degraded," brought down to the realm of humanity in a way that ultimately illuminates not only Adam's egalitarian perception of Eve but humanity's ability to reveal truth more accurately than God as well.

Both before the fall and after, Adam doubts his existence within the confines of who God has told him he is. Is he really "superior"? Is being made in His image really

the most fair? Will he and Eve be put to death after eating the apple? On the other hand, it is again Eve who illuminates the subjectivity of their existence. When she states that losing Adam to another Eve would be a “death to think,” she does not know what death is (IX. 830). God has never explained death, nor has she seen anyone die, yet she understands intrinsically that she cannot be a self without him, and thus death, the opposite of life, becomes solitude. Essentially, Eve realizes that she cannot ever be an “I” without the polarity of Adam’s “you”. Similarly, in rationalizing her fear of replacement, Eve proclaims, “So dear I love him that with him all deaths I could endure, without him live no life” (IX. 832-3). As scholar E.M.W. Tillyard points out in the article “Paradise Lost: The Conscious Meaning and The Unconscious Meaning”, Eve’s “mental levity” is stronger than Adams, and it is ultimately she who illuminates the “besetting sin of humanity; fear of standing alone” that plagues Adam, Eve, and the stability of their selfhoods (Tillyard, 450). Eve has a foresight that Adam does not: she may be at the bottom of the male-established gender hierarchy, but ultimately it is Eve who has the mental foresight to question the subjectivity of God’s law and see the true significance death, happiness and the value of companionship in a way that is interrogatively introspective.

True Knowledge as True Enlightenment:

Throughout *Paradise Lost*, Milton juxtaposes the dualities of male and female, superior and inferior, mortal and divine in order to emphasize the differences at both ends of these binaries. Perhaps the greatest of these contrasts is that of good versus evil and how the knowledge of true good is only possible when it is understood against the backdrop of true ill. For Adam and Eve, all of Eden before their temptation is “infinitely good” because God has made it so, yet the pair have little understanding of the value of “all these joys” without a knowledge of bad for comparison (IV 414, 411). Thus, God’s prescriptive enclosure for humanity, Eden, is under-appreciated by the pair. While Biblical rhetoric and Milton’s own language objectively portray the temptation of Eve and Adam as humanity’s great fall, I assert here that without their temptation, Adam and Eve would never be able to understand each other, themselves, and what it truly means to be human. Without understanding evil, the two can never appreciate paradise, without knowing mortality, they can never appreciate their own life, and without feeling the threat of solitude, they can never appreciate their love for one another. Milton’s speaker explains the necessity of true knowledge before Adam and Eve even speak, explaining: “the Tree of Knowledge, grew fast by:/ Knowledge of good bought dear by knowing ill” (IV. 221-2). Just as female has a male counterpart, so too must good have its own qualifying opposite, and thus, Adam and Eve must be tempted and eat from the Tree of Knowledge in order for humanity to understand the value of “good” and for Adam and Eve to understand the value of life (IV. 414).

As humans, Adam and Eve differ greatly from their perfect and immutable father, God. The pair realizes this difference, aligning themselves with one another and

challenging the laws of God through their own changing perceptions of both one another and Eden. The two come to realize as they grow and experience one another that the meaning and value of their life and surroundings are ultimately products of opinion, and in this way, Adam and Eve reveal the subjectivity of God's structure in Eden. Through conversation, the pair illuminate for each other the ability for humanity to live beyond the fetters of blind obedience to God. In their acquisition of knowledge they see the envisaged nature of God's definitions of death, gender, goodness, and Eden. The idea of Paradise itself is scrutinized as the pair comes to see that utopia is possible anywhere the other is, not just in an idyllic garden. For this reason, Adam and Eve are able go "hand in hand" at the end of the epic, making their "solitary way" out of Paradise with melancholic sadness but with a poignant independence as well (XII. 648, 649). As Adam and Eve grow as humans, they erect a basis for humanity that interrogates the permanency of the selfhood God establishes for them and the hierarchy of both divine and patriarchal authority. It is through their conversations, linguistic interplay, and mutating opinions of one another that Adam and Eve gain insight into the necessary binaries of good and evil. Humankind may have fallen in God's opinion when Eve ate the apple, but in reality, the temptation is necessary for Adam and Eve to define themselves as human, reevaluate the limits of human possibility, and discover the intimate subjectivity of mortality.

Unlike succeeding generations of humans, Adam and Eve are born immortal and pure; they have never seen death or even age, and hence the notion of dying is inconceivable to them. God tells Adam and Eve that the pair is free to do whatever they want in Eden except eat from the Tree of Knowledge "lest ye die" (X. 664). In doing so,

God allows Adam and Eve to do everything they want but have knowledge of true good and bad, thus denying them an understanding of death. And without an understanding of death, life is less a precious gift than a circumstance for the two. As Adam ponders God's ominous threat that they will die lest they eat of the tree, he illuminates the vacuity of God's promise, stating, "So near grows death to life, whate'er death is,/ Some dreadful thing no doubt" (IV. 425-6). Adam and Eve do not understand the objective reality of death: physical expiration. Yet, throughout the course of the epic, Adam and Eve come to define death as "dreadful" for themselves based on the lives they create together. In imagining herself being expelled from Eden alone, Eve exclaims that being replaced by another at Adam's side would be "a death to think!" (IX. 830). Rather than God's intended understanding of death, Adam and Eve redefine the concept of it to mean the loss of each other as a means of self-destruction.

As they have essentially grown-up together, Adam and Eve have grown in speech and faculty based on each other's presences. In companionship, they help each other understand the meaning of their emotions and come to form opinions of their experiences in Eden based on each other. Essentially, in creating each other and themselves, Adam and Eve create their own subjective definition of life to juxtapose with their idea of death. Ironically, it is actually Satan who exposes to them and we readers how truly subjective God's definition of death is, as he explains to Eve that "it gives you life/ to knowledge" (IX. 687). Although he is a villain in the epic, Satan's luring temptation is founded in real truth— to know death is to understand the value of life. In this way, Adam, Eve, and their fall into knowledge reshape the meaning and power of mortality and expose the

subjectivity of God's authority by allowing mankind the knowledge to define its own existence.

Adam similarly reiterates this subjectivity of death, going so far as to verbally redefine the concept itself. When Eve reveals to him that she has eaten from the Tree of Knowledge, he regrets her disobedience but is even more affected by the notion of her leaving him in death. He laments: "If death/ Consort with thee death is to me as life,/... to lose thee were to lose myself" (Book IX, 953-4, 959). Here, Adam not only redefines life and death on his own terms based on the loss of Eve, he reverses their God-given meanings in a way that testifies to the subjectivity of these two concepts. As he and Eve construct their environment and lives based on primal human instincts like desire and perception, they create their own definitions for what it means for life to end. Moreover, Adam's significant cry to Eve, "to lose thee were to lose myself" further emphasizes the reliance of his selfhood on Eve. In this way, Adam and Eve's mortal fellowship becomes intrinsically linked to their selfhoods and understandings of each other. Just as Adam and Eve come to engage one another more so than God, their companionship allows them to redefine the limits of their mortality in a way that supercedes God's authority over them and assigns true self-knowledge a greater precedence over Adam and Eve's existence.

Just as Adam and Eve come to redefine life and death through knowledge, their acquisition of this truth similarly allows them to redefine their roles in each other's lives. When recounting his first waking moments to Raphael, Adam states, "But who I was, or where, or from what cause/ knew not" (IX. 270-1). In these initial waking minutes, Adam does not know who he is or where he has come from. God has made Adam a fully matured male human being, and yet that gradual development of self-hood that

accompanies we modern adults' physical growth is absent in the mentally infantile Adam. That Adam did not know himself in the first few moments of his life testifies to the learned rather than innate sense of selfhood. His absorption of knowledge about the world and himself through Eve throughout the epic and further evidences the notion that selves are not made "immutable" but rather grow unchecked and unpredictably (V.524). Moreover, Adam proclaims in those first nascent moments "[I] feel that I am happier than I know!" illuminating the difference between feeling an emotion and understanding what that emotion actually means (VIII. 282). Feelings are complex sensations that overwhelm Adam before he has another to "partake" in his existence with him and help him comprehend the meaning of his sensations (and ultimately, how he ultimately feels about his own life) (VIII. 364). In this sense, Adam's relationship with Eve allows him to gain a more true understanding of selfhood, as he is able to connect his emotions to real human significance by interacting with her and seeing how she reacts to him. In their knowledge of one another, Adam and Eve separate humanity from their divine parentage, suggesting that a knowledge of selfhood cannot be imparted on either Adam or Eve; rather, they must come to experience their selfhood through the lens of the other in order to fully comprehend it. God may have intended to make Adam superior and Eve submissive, but ultimately, Adam and Eve's perceptions of each other allow them to perceive their selves in a way that is more true and fully felt than God's original molds for the pair.

Eve reinforces the notion that her and Adam's perceptions of one another supercede those of God as well as the fact that over the course of the epic, the pair align

themselves more with fellow humanity than with God. When Raphael visits Adam, he chooses to engage only Adam in an exegetical discourse, yet the speaker says of Eve:

Went she not as not with such discourse
 Delighted or not capable her ear
 Of what was high. Such pleasure she reserved,
 Adam relating, she sole auditress:
 Her husband the relater she preferred
 Before the angel (VIII. 48-53).

Here Milton makes it explicitly clear that Eve is not incapable of the same “high” discourse that Adam and Raphael engage in, and in fact, such lofty conversation “delights” her. In this way, Milton explicitly suggests that Eve is as “capable” of mind as Adam, and she initially chooses to maintain her place as his stated inferior because she would rather have Adam be the “relater” of information. In essence, Eve prefers to learn from fellow humanity, trusting her husband over the messenger of the omniscient God because, despite his divinity, Raphael is not as familiar and thus not as relatable as Adam. On a certain level, Eve’s maintenance of her position entraps her within the confines of gendered submission, limiting an agency that she, as Milton’s speaker makes clear here, possesses far earlier than she realizes. However, her ultimate movement towards independence in her decision to work alone suggests that despite her initial self-subjugation, Eve does not continue to impart inferiority on herself. Instead, Eve simply learns to grow her own way. In perceiving her creation through the lens of Adam rather than Raphael, Eve is able to comprehend her humanity through fellow humanity, allowing her to see her existence as more malleable and subjective and less under God’s authority.

Not only do Adam and Eve expose the meaninglessness of God’s threat of death and his assignment of a gendered hierarchy, they reveal a similar subjectivity of Eden

itself and the notion of a utopic Paradise. Again, it is significantly Satan who sees the real meaning of Paradise first, exclaiming, “Imparadised in one another’s arms,/ The happier Eden” (IV. 506-7). Although Satan’s exclamation is one of bitterness, the enjambment of his lines, “one another’s arms,/ the happier Eden” conveys the subjectivity of space that Adam and Eve similarly illuminate to at the end of the epic when they leave Eden. The “happier” Eden (and therefore the more true version of paradise for Adam and Eve) is in each other’s arms— a place that only they can inhabit with each other more wonderful than even God’s garden. The verb “Imparadised” also works to emphasize this shift from defining paradise as an idealistic garden to the seeing a utopic paradise as a product of human love. That is, the verb “imparadised” conveys a sense of intimate enrapture that Adam and Eve feel for each other rather than for the physical space they inhabit. Adam says that God has surely made Eden a place “not secure to single or combined,” giving God generous credit for creating a space Adam still believes objectively perfect (IX. 39). Yet Adam, in spite of his love for God, also comes to see that Eden must be an internal reality in order to be an external one; otherwise “Eden were no Eden thus exposed” (IX. 341). The actual, physical Eden is merely a garden without someone to experience it with, and thus, for Adam and Eve the “happier Eden” is the more intimate location in one another’s arms.

Adam and Eve also ultimately have a more conscious and explicit realization of this subjective meaning of Eden. When Eve first eats the apple from the Tree of Knowledge, she is overcome with fear that she will be replaced by another Eve at Adam’s side, which drives her to convince him to eat the fruit as well. At first her fear is compelled by the thought of being cast out of Eden alone: the thought of solitude is as

threatening as expulsion suggesting that her perception of Adam and Eden are intrinsically linked. However, as Eve awakens to true knowledge, she comes to see that it is really Adam alone who is her Paradise. After Christ explains to Eve and Adam that they will be exiled from Eden for their disobedience, Eve explains to a bereft Adam:

With thee to go
Is to stay here; without thee here to stay
Is to go hence unwilling. Thou to me
Art all things under Heav'n, all places thou (Book XII, 615-618)

Here, Eve significantly reverses “go” and “stay” in a way that almost blasphemously shows that for her, Heaven is Adam, not God. Yet Eve’s reversal is one that also works to illuminate the notion that Heaven, and true happiness, are not universal, fixed definitions. Instead, the rapture and love that “Heaven” signifies is a personal place in Eve’s heart that belongs to Adam.

In her above declaration to Adam, Eve brings Heaven down to the realm of humanity, positing the notion that the Divine is within the mortal pair rather than above them as a ruler. Milton’s speaker captures this closeness of Godliness, explaining “Earth be changed to Heav’n and Heav’n to Earth,/ One Kingdom, joy and union without end” (VII. 160-1). Earth and Heaven are not, as Biblical versions of creation would like to suggest, separate entities or layers of creation that run parallel to one another never touching but always looking at one another with hierarchical gazes. Rather, Heaven and Earth are one, a Miltonic view that not only makes the idea of Heaven a subjective one but also discredits the patriarchal authority of God to rule literally over Adam and Eve. Moreover, the speaker’s use of “union” suggests not just a harmony between Heaven and Earth but a sense espousal and intrinsic linkage between the two. Just as Adam and Eve

“are one,” so too are Heaven and Earth, illuminating the subjectivity of not just Eden but of God’s authority and the notion of Heaven above as well (IX. 958).

As a character, Satan represents exiled discontent, and in his manipulation of Eve and her temptation, he ultimately also helps her see past the façade of perfection in Eden and the subjectivity of God’s law. Satan forces Eve to interrogate her role and identity in paradise through the landscape of her dreams, entering her mind in sleep and telling her:

Is knowledge so despised?
Or envy or what reserve forbids to taste?
Forbid who will, none shall from me withhold
Longer thy offered good: why else set here? (V. 60-63).

If knowledge is prohibited, than why did God plant the Tree of Knowledge in Eden?

Why is this tree “fairer” looking than the others in Eden (V. 53)? Satan forces Eve to question the limits God has imposed on her, and in planting these seeds of doubt into her subconscious, he allows her to see the ability of good, truth, and pleasure to exist outside of God’s authority. Doubt moreover, a sensation that both Adam and Eve experience, is only one of the many imperfections that distinguish the pair from God, and as Diane McColley points out, referencing Millicent Bell’s essay “The Fallacy of the Fall in Paradise Lost,” Adam and Eve’s fall “‘is not the onset of sin’ but the ‘beginning of self-discovery by creatures essentially human’” (104). Sin and doubt allow Adam and Eve to understand their limits as humans different from God, a process Bell likens to self-discovery because it makes them aware of their humane imperfections, how human needs can transcend the will of God, and ultimately how the two are different from God. Essentially, these seemingly negative concepts of death and sin allow Adam and Eve to understand who they are as imperfect, desiring, and “essentially human” selves.

Satan's above logic persuades Eve, and while biblically Satan's actions are seen as beguiling, deceitful, and nefarious, I would like to examine Satan's persuasion as a stable and valid rationale that catalyzes Adam and Eve's growth and self-discovery.

Mirroring Satan's sound albeit manipulative logic, Eve proclaims after eating the apple:

For good unknown sure is not had or had
And yet unknown is as not had at all!
In plain then what forbids He but to know,
Forbids us good, forbids us to be wise?
Such prohibitions bind not! But if death
Bind us with after-bands what profits then
Our inward freedom? (Book IX, 755-762)

Through Satan, temptation, and disobedience, Eve comes to realize the ultimate truth that if she does not know the difference between good and bad, than she does not know good at all. She realizes here how God's authority "binds" her and Adam, forbidding them from really knowing each other and essentially keeping the pair lower than He by entrapping them in ignorant dependence. In using this notion of binaries between good and bad, Eve creates a more social, actualized journey to self-knowledge through knowledge itself. In this vein of binary juxtapositions, for Eve to not know Adam would be for her to have no self-awareness or true grasp on her life in Eden because it is only in comparing herself to a "you" that she sees her sense of "I" more clearly.

Ultimately, Adam and Eve's acquisition of true knowledge is their true enlightenment, helping them realize not only themselves but allowing them to see the honesty of their love for one another by testing it with true hardship. In withstanding the test of their disobedience, and the knowledge of true ill that inevitably accompanies knowledge of true good, Adam and Eve are able to see that their love for one another, and their self-awareness, is not just a Divine construct but a truly and authentically felt

sensation on both their parts. Even the angel Michael, an agent of God, confirms this revelation at the end of the epic, explaining to an uncertain Adam, “Then wilt thou not be loath/ To leave this Paradise, but shalt possess/ A paradise within thee, happier far” (Book XII, 585-587). Michael exposes the ultimate essence of God’s and Eden’s subjectivity: Paradise is an internal reality, and Eden is merely a place to live in this utopic state. Michael’s statement here intends to convey the sense that, although they are leaving Eden, Adam and Eve will always take God within them wherever they go. However, his statement is ultimately applicable to Adam and Eve’s autonomy away from God as well. He helps the pair see that they are not dependent on God for happiness, and instead they have an agency over their own destiny and possess the ability to create their own happiness as well. They take God with them in their hearts out of the gates of Eden, but Adam and Eve mostly take each other in a “paradise within”. As two more fully-formed adults, they leave with the final understanding that in knowing each other, and knowing themselves, they, despite their fallibility and mortality, can make their own way.

Conclusion:

Philosopher Emmanuel Levinas writes:

“The subject who speaks is situated in relation to the other. This privilege of the other ceases to be incomprehensible once we admit that the first fact of existence is neither being in itself nor being for itself but being for the other...”¹⁰

Adam and Eve have their own subjectivities: they are not the same person, they are guided by different caprices and emotions, and they do argue. Yet all the same, Adam and Eve endure for each other— not themselves, because they know that they as selves cannot subsist alone. As readers, we find in Adam and Eve what Levinas suggests: we situate our consciousness of “I,” or our sense of selfhood, in relation to the echo of the other. In this way, our entire identity as selves is predicated on our interactions with the other, and hence, we are who we are because of and for that other. Most importantly though, and this is especially applicable to Adam and Eve, Levinas suggests that humans come to an understanding of selfhood through language and social interaction. As Adam and Eve’s speech evolves from recitation to authentic, impassioned dialogue, they realize that in positioning themselves as an “I” they “situate” themselves in relation to the other’s “you”. Thus through the pronominal, mirroring nature of conversation they come to individuate themselves by seeing themselves totally in the context of the reflecting other.

Because of this crucial mirroring dynamic Adam and Eve experience, their existence is a necessarily plural state not just conversationally but physically as well. When Eve and Adam take each other’s hands at the end of the epic, they symbolically make their distance as two separate individuals tangible. In the extension of one hand to

¹⁰ Rankine, Claudia. *Dont Let Me Be Lonely*. N.p.: Graywolf Press, 2004. N. pag. Print .

another, the pair measure the distance between themselves in a way that is metonymic of their subjective, physical, and emotional differences joining together in the union of humanity. Earlier too in Book IV, Adam “seized” Eve’s hand— a gesture some critics¹¹ read as one of possession and dominance (IV. 489). While I recognize the possibility of this sentiment, I instead would like to suggest that Adam’s seizing of Eve is done less out of possession than out of reassurance. In taking Eve’s hand— in physically touching his fellow human who is made in his “image”— Adam affirms both himself as an individual and her as a physical other on which to build his individuality (IV. 472). Adam grasps Eve’s hand in the desperation with which a child seizes his or her mother and for the same reason: to affirm she is there by his side. Thus, Adam and Eve’s leaving Eden “hand in hand” is neither a leading nor patronizing gesture on Adam’s part (XII. 648). Put as an adverbial phrase rather than as a definitive statement, this final image is a more instinctual gesture representing Adam and Eve’s mutual understanding of their need for, and more importantly, their love of, one another. Essentially, what makes Adam and Eve’s holding hands so powerful as an ending image isn’t merely its service as a symbol of physical unity but is also a representation of two individual autonomies organically becoming one.

This coming together of two individuals is echoed earlier in the epic when Eve first learns the difference between herself and Adam. Eve’s first vision of humanity is of herself, as she sees what she does not yet realize is her own reflection in a pool of water. Pleased and detained by her own image, the “shape within the wat’ry gleam” mirrors Eve

¹¹ Walker, Julia M. "Eve: The First Reflection." *Medusa's Mirrors: Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, and the Metamorphosis of the Female Self*. By Julia M Walker. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1998. 166-70. Print.

in a way that entrances her until God steps in to lead her to Adam (IV. 461). He persuades her to leave the lake stating, “And I will bring thee where no shadow stays/ Thy coming and thy soft embraces” (IV. 470-1). Unlike Eve’s “shadow” or her own reflection, which is dependent on her presence and her actions, Adam is a fixed being independent of Eve and what she does. Adam will be present when Eve gazes on him, but unlike her reflection in the water, he’ll still exist when she turns away. Unlike a shadow, Adam is autonomous of Eve’s “coming” and going; her “soft embraces” will not be lost in a ripple of destroyed reflection but will instead be returned with an answering embrace. Although Eve barely knows herself on a physical level let alone on an emotionally introspective one, here is the first time she comes to see herself, her physicality, and her actions as different from another, and thus she first comes to see herself as an individual. As the epic progresses, Eve comes to develop on this understanding, further differentiating herself from Adam as a separate person. She comes to understand how she differs from him and sees both his and her own subjectivities manifest through her developing speech and complex perceptions of Adam, herself, and their role in each other’s lives.

In *Paradise Lost* moreover, the cultural does not encroach on the personal. Eden is not a pre-existing society that imposes societal pressures on Adam and Eve, and thus they are never told how to feel nor are the construction of their identities manipulated by cultural notions of normalcy (they are only instructed by the hollow edicts of Heaven). Instead, the pair’s emotions and opinions of themselves, each other, and the world they inhabit emerge their own and are based on the caprices of their instincts and their comprehension of one another. The closest Adam and Eve get to experiencing societal

influence is through Milton's God who is, in a way, a representation of social pressure that is really less societal than it is parental. When recounting his initial waking moments, Adam himself actually articulates God's shaping influence in a way that illuminates how limiting the restrictions of conventionality and obedience are to selfhood, stating: "taught to live/ The easiest way nor with perplexing thoughts/ To interrupt the sweet of life" (VIII. 182-4). To be "taught to live" defies the very notion of living itself, as Adam and Eve later discover, and denies Adam and Eve the ability to grow as selves or experience the true "sweet of life". Instead of a selfhood learned by rote as Milton's God would have it, Adam and Eve realize through each other who they are, and in breaking from their initial blind faith, they discover that adherence and blind obedience is puppetry, not existence.

Moreover, that God creates a standard for Adam and Eve's existence suggests that to have "perplexing thoughts," that is, to question their positions in Eden and to wonder about their own lives, is to "interrupt" the illusory safety of obedience. Yet, as Adam and Eve ultimately realize through their eventual allegiance to one another over God, normalcy, just like God's notions of death, Eden, and knowledge, is subjective. Essentially, not only do Adam and Eve recognize that God's law is only an authority if they believe in it, they also come to see that who they are as selves is a function of who they want to be to each other and not who they should be in Eden. It is in this vein that the pair realize the fallacy of their gendered hierarchy. Eve is "for" Adam under God's will, but the two make it evident that power or dominance of one over the other must be earned rather than assumed (IV. 299). In this revelation, Adam comes to see Eve as a much more capable equal than she is originally "taught" she is by God (VIII. 182).

Adam and Eve ultimately question their constructed gender hierarchy, and their constructed senses of selfhoods in a way that proves that conventional pressures are inauthentic and impermanent on the true nature of the self. Who Adam and Eve are to one another becomes the structured relationship with the most truth to them.

Language is one of the most basic yet essential ways Adam and Eve come to see the subjectivity of God's laws and parameters on their identities. As Adam and Eve develop their faculties of speech, they realize that they gain knowledge and expand on their abilities by engaging in speech with the other. The act of thinking is inherently conversational— thoughts are articulated internally with language and thus, through dialogue, Adam and Eve not only learn to talk to one another but to think about both themselves and each other more deeply and personally. Adam says of Eve in Book VIII:

Wisdom in discourse with her
Loses discount'nanced and like folly shows.
Authority and Reason on her wait
As one intended first, not after made
Occasionally. And to consummate all,
Greatness of mind and nobleness their seat
Build in her loveliest and create an awe.... (VIII. 552-558).

Adam's statement is as much an objective truth as it is a compliment. Adam, "in discourse" with Eve, comes to see his "follies" and becomes aware of the fact that he is imperfect, despite what God has told him. By conversing with each other, Adam and Eve are able to reason and test the capabilities and capacities of their own minds. They challenge each other as intellectuals through speech, allowing them to form more metaphysical perceptions of themselves and one another. Significantly, God made Adam in his image and Eve after Adam's; He makes the pair allegedly perfect because they are modeled after God himself. Yet when Adam realizes for himself that he as a human

being has follies and flaws, and that maybe Eve is not inferior to him as God had said, he suggests that humanity inherently trusts and relies on its own kind for true understanding. Ultimately, it is a recognition of sameness through interactions, speech, and desire that allow Adam and Eve as humans to know for certain who they are (V. 524).

In his essay “Existentialism is a Humanism,” Jean Paul Sartre reaffirms this sentiment on a more general, encompassing level, stating:

“Contrary to the philosophy of Descartes, contrary to that of Kant, when we say ‘I think’ we are attaining to ourselves in the presence of the other, and we are just as certain of the other as we are of ourselves. Thus the man who discovers himself directly in the *cogito* also discovers all the others, and discovers them as the condition of his own existence. He recognizes that he cannot be anything (in the sense in which one says one is spiritual, or that one is wicked or jealous) unless others recognize him as such”.¹²

Essentially, “I think” is not an interior action as Descartes posited when he said “I think, therefore I am”¹³. “I” positions the self in relation to a “you” in a way that allows the speaker to “attain” to selfhood or at least to a consciousness of selfhood because it puts the self in relation to the other. Similarly, to “think” is, as I have described above, an ultimately social action based in language. When Adam and Eve become certain of “the other,” they make a subconscious decision to distinguish themselves as individuals. To apply Sartre to the earlier Miltonic vision of Adam and Eve, the pair cannot have any notion of selfhood or individuating qualities without an affirmation from the necessary other. It is through recognizing how they differ from one another that they come to recognize and differentiate who they are as selves. Adam and Eve “cannot be anything” as individuals unless the other recognizes he or she as such. Hence their understanding of

¹² Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Existentialism is a Humanism*. Trans. Carol Macomber. N.p.: Yale University Press, 2007. Print.

¹³ Descartes, Renee. *Discourse on the Method*

selfhood is totally reliant and predicated on each other's presence and perceptions. Thus, following Sartre's theory, Adam and Eve are the definitive "conditions" of each other's "existence". For the parents of human kind, the self is inherently and absolutely contingent upon the other.

While Levinas and Sartre came well after Milton's *Paradise Lost*, my intent in drawing on the theories of these two philosophers is to illuminate the universality of Adam and Eve's impact on one another's self hood. Of course, the story of Adam and Eve in Paradise cannot literally or totally be applied to modern life, but in examining these two philosophers' positions on the importance of an "other" for a self, it is clear that Adam and Eve, despite their unique conception, are as human as we modern readers. When I apply modern conceptions of humanity to Adam and Eve, instead of the other way around, it is clear that they are as malleable, imperfect, and curious as we modern readers despite their situation as immaculately conceived creations of fiction. This is particularly evident in Book VIII where Adam, in describing Eve to Raphael, comments on how self-sufficient Eve "seems" (VIII. 547). As I have discussed in relation to this passage, his use of the word "seems" suggests that Adam's impression is subjective and unfixed. Adam ultimately is simultaneously expanding on, reaffirming, and revising his impression of himself through his developed understanding of Eve. Moreover, as Adam and Eve grow closer to one another, they learn about not just each other as individuals but what makes them human as well. In conversing with one another, they learn to articulate their desire for one another and their perceptions of one another in the context of Eden. In this way, Adam and Eve further their developments as humans: in placing

themselves closer together yet further from God, they ultimately aligns themselves more with one another than with their Divine parent.

As much as Adam and Eve are in fact necessary conditions of one another's existence and senses of selves, the bond they share transcends mere necessity. Ultimately, it is the love that the pair share for one another that is the true requirement for their understanding of selfhood and the world around them as well as for true happiness. Beyond the connection of their shared humanity, physical desire, and mortal curiosity, love, for Adam and Eve, is what "refines/ The thoughts and heart enlarges" (VIII. 589-90). Love is what makes Adam and Eve open to learning about the other and thus ultimately about themselves as well. Where at first Adam and Eve simply endure for one another through mere companionship, by the end of the epic it is clear that Adam and Eve are not simply enduring for one another but are truly existing because of and for their deep love for one another. As Adam explains to Raphael when describing Eve, "Those thousand decencies that daily flow/ From all her words and actions mixed with love" (VIII. 601-602). Adam recognizes that at the base of all their interactions and connections with one another lies Eve's love for him that creates "those thousand decencies". In his words, Adam makes the fallible and imperfect realm of humanity divine: the love Adam and Eve share has the power to make the mortal world a Paradise. As much as Adam and Eve's consumption of true knowledge awakens them to the realities of one another, it is their love for one another at the core of their very beings. It is the divinity of not God but love that allows them to feel, on a much more certain and innate level, that true Paradise, the place where they feel like their best selves, is not in Eden but is instead in each other's arms.

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