



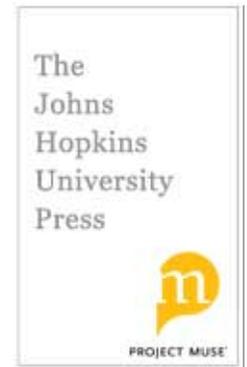
PROJECT MUSE®

The Falls of Satan, Eve, and Adam in John Milton's *Paradise
Lost* : A Study in Insincerity

David V. Urban

Christianity & Literature, Volume 67, Number 1, December 2017, pp. 89-112
(Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press



➔ For additional information about this article

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/735691>

The Falls of Satan, Eve, and Adam in John Milton's *Paradise Lost*: A Study in Insincerity

Christianity & Literature
2017, Vol. 67(1) 89–112

© The Conference on Christianity
and Literature, 2017

Reprints and permissions:
sagepub.co.uk/

journalsPermissions.nav

DOI: 10.1177/0148333117731098

journals.sagepub.com/home/cal



David V. Urban

Calvin College, US

Abstract

This article examines the falls of Satan, Eve, and Adam in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, arguing that these characters demonstrate neither sincere theology nor genuinely sincere behavior in their initial transgressions and continued unrepentant behavior. In analyzing matters of sincerity concerning these characters, this article interacts with numerous voices in the history of *Paradise Lost* criticism, particularly those critics who, advocating a Romantic understanding of sincerity against traditional Christianity, have defended the decisions of Satan, Eve, and Adam to transgress against God's commands. This article also examines Adam and Eve's sincere repentance later in Milton's epic.

Keywords

Milton, Satan, Eve, Adam, fall

The classic treatments of sincerity in the second half of the twentieth century have not emphasized the word's older theological meaning. Although both Patricia M. Ball (1964) and Lionel Trilling (1972) note, in Ball's words, that earlier "implications of sincerity were predominantly religious," with the word being "used to affirm purity of belief, genuine doctrine, freedom from theological duplicity" (1), both Ball and Trilling stress that the effects of Romanticism and subsequent cultural movements brought the word to mean, as it still does in common parlance, "a congruence between avowal and actual feeling" (Trilling 2).¹ As we investigate matters of sincerity in John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667, second edition 1674), we must recognize that for the pre-Romantic Milton, sincerity is foremost a

Corresponding author:

David V. Urban, Calvin College Department of English, 1795 Knollcrest Circle SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49546-4404, USA.

Email: dvu2@calvin.edu

theological concern, and thus, that “feeling,” per se, is not a proper measure of a person’s sincerity; for, as events in *Paradise Lost* reveal, feelings can fluctuate wildly in the human heart and, if followed, lead characters to disobey God and fall into sin. Milton most certainly recognizes and emphasizes, however, a connection between theological purity and the unfeigned honesty of the individual in question. This connection is evident when Milton’s God the Father, speaking to his Son concerning why human and angelic wills must be free, asks, “Not free, what proof could they have givn sincere / Of true allegiance, constant Faith or Love” (3.103–04)?² The individual angel or human must make the sincere choice to obey faithfully the true God on his terms, and that character cannot offer the Romantic argument that he or she chose disobedience through “sincere” feelings and actions of dissent.³

But my preceding sentence, despite the above quotation from Milton’s God, has not been universally accepted in Milton criticism. Implicitly or explicitly, the matter of sincerity in *Paradise Lost* has been debated for the past two centuries, roughly since the advent of Romanticism’s alternative understanding of sincerity. Most significantly, although Satan, Eve, and Adam clearly transgress God’s explicit commands during their respective falls (and, in the case of Satan, throughout his continued rebellion against God), eliciting critical censure throughout the decades, each character has also been defended by critics who argue that these characters disobey God for sincere and appropriate reasons. Against such critics—some of the most important of whom flourished during the mid-twentieth-century “Satan controversy”—I will argue that neither Satan’s, Eve’s, nor Adam’s decisions to transgress can be considered “sincere” in terms of either the pre-Romantic understanding of sincerity as theological purity or the largely romantic understanding of sincerity as unfeigned honesty. Rather, each character’s respective fall betrays both impious and self-serving motivations that undercut claims to sincerity proffered by either the characters themselves or their critical defenders.

As the previous paragraphs suggest, our understanding of sincerity and its absence in *Paradise Lost* is predicated upon what definitions of sincere/sincerity we employ while analyzing Milton’s poem. The two definitions I will use are adapted from the *Oxford English Dictionary* and can be called “theological purity” and “unfeigned honesty.” “Theological purity” derives both from the *OED*’s first definition of “sincere”: “1. Not falsified or perverted in any way: a. *Of doctrine*, etc.: Genuine, pure” (emphasis mine); and the *OED*’s first definition of “sincerity”: “1. The character, quality, or state of being sincere. a. Freedom from falsification, adulteration, or alloy; purity, correctness.” Throughout this essay, when I use the term “theological purity” (or “doctrinal purity”), I refer to a form of sincerity defined not merely by honest self-representation but more importantly by fidelity to sound doctrine itself. By contrast, “Unfeigned honesty” derives from later *OED* definitions of “sincere”: “3. Containing no element of dissimulation or deception; not feigned or pretended; real, true”; “4. Characterized by the absence of all dissimulation or pretense; honest, straightforward”; and from the second *OED* definition of “sincerity”: “2a. Freedom from dissimulation or

duplicity; honesty, straightforwardness.” As I address matters of sincerity in *Paradise Lost*, I will assume one or both of the aforementioned basic definitions. Significantly, although the definition of sincerity as “unfeigned honesty”—a sincerity of conviction as opposed to the sincere purity of a doctrine itself—is largely connected with Romanticism and gains more emphasis in light of Romanticism’s emphasis on feelings, the *OED*’s lists of examples connected to “unfeigned honesty” as well as the King James Bible’s use of “sincerity” show that such usage was already common in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and certainly germane to our discussion of *Paradise Lost*.

Satan’s Fall

Satan falls both through his refusal to worship the Son of God and through the angelic rebellion he subsequently leads. Various critics have defended Satan’s actions, and these defenses have argued not only for Satan’s sincerity of feeling and motive in his defiance of God the Father and the Son, but also, ironically enough, have suggested Satan’s *theological* sincerity with regard to him challenging the impure doctrinal innovations the Father purportedly introduces in his decree that the angels worship the Son. My argument throughout this section contends that Satan is actually insincere in both senses of the word. In his rebellion, Satan does not defend doctrinal purity but rather offers theological innovations of his own; nor are his motivations and convictions genuinely sincere but rather are, by his own eventual admission, grounded in a dishonest narrative of false accusation and self-exaltation.

On the face of it, the idea that Satan’s initial rebellion is somehow motivated by sincere theological purity may strike readers as absurd. But depending on how one understands the Father’s decree, the idea that Satan is opposing God’s theological inconsistencies holds some plausibility and was put forth by several prominent Milton critics in the nineteenth and earlier twentieth centuries. We must remember that the Father elicited Satan’s rebellious response by ordering the angels to worship the Son, whose earlier state of existence has been the subject of important critical debate. The Father’s decree, reported to Adam and Eve by the angel Raphael while he visits Eden to warn them of Satan’s machinations, is spoken thus:

Hear all ye Angels, Progenie of Light,
 Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms, Vertues, Powers,
 Hear my Decree, which unrevok’t shall stand.
 This day I have begot whom I declare
 My onely Son, and on this holy Hill
 Him have anointed, whom ye now behold
 At my right hand; your Head I him appoint;
 And by my Self have sworn to him shall bow
 All knees in Heav’n, and shall confess him Lord:
 Under his great Vice-gerent Reign abide

United as one individual Soule
 For ever happie: him who disobeyes
 Mee disobeyes, breaks union, and that day
 Cast out from God and blessed vision, falls
 Into utter darkness, deep ingulft, his place
 Ordaind without redemption, without end. (5.600–15)

Significantly, the Father commands, on pain of eternal damnation, that all the angels worship and obey the Son even as they do the Father himself. The angels respond with seemingly unanimous rejoicing and worship, but Satan, speaking to his companion Beelzebub, complains of the “new Laws” the Father has “impos’d” (679–680). Satan then assembles his legions and indignantly challenges the Father’s decree, particularly the idea that the Son “now hath to himself ingross’t / All Power, and us eclips’d under the name / Of King anointed,” objecting that he and the angels were “ordain’d to govern, not to serve” (775–77, 802). If we disregard Raphael’s narratorial comments that Satan’s concerns are inspired by his “envy against the Son of God” (662) and that his speech to his legions is offered “with calumnious Art / Of counterfeted truth” (770–71),⁴ we can investigate the possibility that Satan’s dissent is motivated by legitimate opposition to the Father’s impure and thus *insincere* theology.

We must recognize that the critical decision to disregard a narratorial statement that challenges the veracity of a character’s statements is an assertive interpretive choice that significantly changes how one understands the character in question. It is not a choice I subscribe to in reading Milton’s epic. But it is a decision that various Milton critics have implicitly or explicitly made, and it is an approach to analyzing *Paradise Lost*, particularly the character of Satan, advocated by A. J. A. Waldock in his chapter “Satan and the Technique of Degradation” in his highly influential book *“Paradise Lost” and Its Critics* (1947). In this chapter, Waldock, employing a Romanticized understanding of Satan’s sincerity, argues that Milton, concerned that Satan’s “glorious” speeches might seduce readers, uses his narrative voice “to correct, to damp down and neutralize” Satan’s words (78). But Waldock contends that readers should recognize that the authentic Satan is represented by Satan’s own words, not those of Milton’s moralizing narrator.⁵

But well before Waldock’s book, critics argued that Satan had genuine *theological* reason to oppose the Father’s command to worship the Son. According to Walter Bagehot’s 1859 reading of the Father’s decree, Milton carelessly legitimizes Satan’s alleged heroism by having the Father command worship for the just-created Son. Bagehot reads “This day I have begot” (5.603) as meaning that the Son first exists on the day of the decree. Consequently, Bagehot considers this scene “almost irreligious, and certainly different from that which has been generally accepted in Christendom” (209). If Bagehot’s reading is accurate, then Satan’s objections to worshipping the Son carry with them an ironic doctrinal sincerity, for Satan is opposing a heretical presentation by Milton and the Father. From Bagehot’s perspective, even the loyal angel Abdiel’s argument against Satan’s

dissent—that the Son actually created the angels and is thus worthy of their reverence (see especially 5.835–40)—is “rather specious” (210). Bagehot disbelieves Abdiel’s argument because, according to his reading, it contradicts the Father’s words that affirm the Son’s begetting on the very day of the decree, and because Satan himself denies it, asserting instead that the angels were not created but rather “self-begot, self-rai’s’d / By our own quick’ning power” (5.860–61) (Bagehot 210).

Bagehot’s analysis of the Father’s decree is essentially restated in two of the most enduringly influential books of Milton criticism of the early twentieth century. In *Milton* (1900), Walter Raleigh echoes Bagehot’s reading of “This day I have begot,” asserting that the decree “flies in the face of the Athanasian Creed by representing the generation of the Son as an event occurring in time” (82). By explicitly setting this episode against a classic document of Christian orthodoxy, Raleigh supports the notion that Satan legitimately opposes the Father’s doctrinal insincerity, offering, ironically enough, a challenge to the Father’s theological whimsy. And in his seminal work, *Milton: Man and Thinker* (1925), Denis Saurat agrees that the Father’s “begot” means “created”—despite the obvious conflict with what Milton asserts in his posthumously discovered tome of systematic theology, *De Doctrina Christiana*⁶—with Milton contradicting his own theological beliefs to provide “a valid poetical reason for Satan’s rebellion” (Saurat 209). What Saurat calls a “valid poetical reason” can also be considered a sincere theological reason, for in opposing the newly created Son, Satan opposes, in Saurat’s view, Milton’s heretical presentation of the Son in *Paradise Lost* book 5.

The argument that the yet-unfallen Satan opposes the Father’s decree because of sincere theological scruples is indeed intriguing, but this argument is based on a misreading of the Father’s statement, “This day I have begot.” As Herbert J. C. Grierson demonstrates in a 1926 review of Saurat’s book and then restates in *Milton and Wordsworth* (1937), “begot” does not mean “created” but rather “exalted” (*Milton* 99). Grierson’s affirmation—“justly acclaimed as a breakthrough in Milton criticism” (Leonard, *Faithful* 440)—reflects an orthodox Christian understanding of Psalm 2:7 in light of Hebrews 1:5 and demonstrates the error of Bagehot’s, Raleigh’s, and Saurat’s readings of “This day I have begot” even as it essentially gives the lie to Satan’s denial of Abdiel’s claim that the Son created the angels. Moreover, this proper understanding of “begot” deprives Satan of any pretense of theological sincerity even as it deprives him of any orthodox theological grounding for his alleged sincerity of conviction in his continued rebellion against God, placing himself rather in the company of the Son’s earthly enemies, whom Satan anticipates and represents (Ide 151–52; see Psalm 2.2–3). Indeed, Satan’s pretentious, insincere indignation against the command to worship the Son leads ineluctably to his theological insincerity regarding the angels’ creation and the Son’s role in it. Neil Forsythe’s 2003 defense of Satan on this point—that God should have clarified that his use of “begot” was metaphorical rather than literal—both irresponsibly ignores Grierson’s analysis and incorrectly generalizes that it is “the pro-God critics” who have “insisted” on the metaphorical meaning (176). In fact, Grierson himself greatly disliked Milton’s God and favored

Satan, and pro-Satan critics since Grierson have acknowledged the metaphorical meaning of “begot.”⁷

Forsythe’s recalcitrance notwithstanding, Grierson’s analysis of “begot” successfully laid to rest the most powerful argument in favor of Satan’s theological sincerity. Nonetheless, another theologically based argument—originating with Saurat and based on a misreading of a patristic sermon—has remained unchallenged and continues to circulate.⁸ In *Milton: Man and Thinker*, Saurat, in an effort to trace Milton’s source material, discusses the spurious *Clementine Homilies* (ca. 3rd century), claiming that Homily XIX, chapter 5 “says that the devil had no beginning” (271). In *Milton’s God* (1961), the pro-Satan critic William Empson links Saurat’s brief discussion of Homily XIX to his own sympathetic analysis of Milton’s Satan’s denial that God created him and the other angels (82–85). And in *The Value of Milton* (2016), John Leonard quotes Empson’s reference to Homily XIX as evidence that “Satan’s argument can be defended” by means of sources available to Milton (80). There is a significant problem, however, with these scholars’ use of Homily XIX: In fact, this homily *never asserts* that “the devil had no beginning.” Rather, in chapter 5 the character Peter merely *hypothesizes*, “if it should be proved that [the devil] were not created, inasmuch as he existed forever” (*Clementine* 332), and from Peter’s hypothetical statement Saurat derived his misreading. But chapters 12 and 13 of the homily explicitly assert that God, without blame, created the being who became the devil (334). This misreading of Homily XIX is significant because it was first made by arguably the most influential Milton scholar of the early twentieth century, was passed on through the most important pro-Satan Miltonist of the latter half of the twentieth century, and has recently been repeated by Leonard, perhaps the most knowledgeable living Miltonist. But a proper reading of Homily XIX eliminates any suggestion that Milton’s Satan’s spurious claim of self-begetting has patristic support.

In any event, Satan’s critical defenders have offered intriguing if not finally convincing challenges to Abdiel’s arguments against Satan. Both Waldock (71) and Empson (*Milton’s* 83) legitimately ask how Abdiel knows that the Son created the angels. Empson, drawing on Darwinian thought, goes so far as to defend Satan’s argument that the angels are self-begot (88–89), suggesting that Milton himself had some sympathy for the notion. And Leonard, without completely accepting Empson’s conclusions, builds on Empson’s argument, comparing Satan not only to Darwin but also to the more contemporary “New Atheists” Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens (*Value* 79). Such critical analysis, however unorthodox, leaves room for the notion that Satan, though erring from sincere theological purity, nonetheless displays sincerity of conviction regarding his own positions. But the notion of Satan’s possible sincerity of conviction here, as I shall discuss shortly, is undercut by Satan’s own words when he speaks a soliloquy apart from his followers.

Critical arguments for Satan’s sincere convictions have been propagated since the advent of Romanticism’s alternative understanding of sincerity. Percy Bysshe

Shelley in *A Defence of Poetry* (1821) emphasizes the sincerity of the post-fall Satan after he and his fellow rebels have been violently cast out of Heaven. Indeed, the fallen Satan's seemingly sincere determination to strive continually against a sadistic and perpetually hurtful God is what elicits Shelley's sympathy in this passage:

Milton's Devil as a moral being is as far superior to his God as one who perseveres in some purpose which he has conceived to be excellent in spite of adversity and torture to one who in the cold security of undoubted triumph inflicts the most horrible revenge upon his enemy. (290)

Shelley's Romantic celebration of Satan's sincerity is revealed in Shelley's phrase "he *has conceived* to be excellent" (emphasis mine)—a phrase that emphasizes Satan's sincere mindset over any measurable excellence of his cause—as well as the dogged perseverance Satan displays amid God's incessant cruelty toward him. Shelley also affirms that God's tyranny justifies Satan's continuous rebellion against him, an argument that Empson develops greatly in *Milton's God*. Indeed, Empson even suggests "that God intentionally deluded Satan" to tempt him into rebellion (42). More recently, Michael Bryson (2004) has argued that Satan's challenge to Abdiel's assertion of God's kingship (see 5.789–92, 813–18, and 822–25) is legitimized because this challenge echoes Milton's own arguments in his political writings against kingship (98–100). Bryson's argument, however, fails to distinguish between sinful human kings and God, and Bryson must predicate his arguments on the dubious hermeneutic, following Shelley and Empson, that reads Milton's God as a tyrant. Indeed, the idea that God is a tyrant—exemplified by Satan's seemingly authentic convictions regarding God's tyranny—is necessary to argue for the supposedly sincere intentions behind Satan's revolt against Milton's deity.

An example of Satan's allegedly sincere resoluteness against this tyrannical God appears early in the epic when, speaking to his companion Beelzebub, Satan boasts of the fallen angels' ability to again challenge God. Satan describes himself, his flock, and his plans:

In Arms not worse, in foresight much advanc't,
We may with more successful hope resolve
To wage by force or guile eternal Warr
Irreconcilable, to our grand Foe,
Who now triumphs, and in th' excess of joy
Sole reigning holds the Tyranny of Heav'n. (1.119–24)

Waldock's admiration of this passage is such that he pointedly challenges Milton's narrator for his ensuing commentary: "So spake the Apostate Angel, though in pain, / Vaunting aloud, but rackt with deep despare" (125–26). Affirming Satan's sincerity and deriding Milton's comment, Waldock writes that Satan's speech "would almost seem to be incompatible" with "much despair" (78).

Satan's alleged sincerity in this passage is predicated upon his genuine belief that God is indeed tyrannical. But Satan's attempts to portray himself as God's victim are exposed as fallacious by Satan's own words when Satan comes to Earth to tempt Adam and Eve. Here the lone Satan, with no followers to impress, experiences misery amid Earth's beauty. As his conscience reminds him of his lost glory, Satan recognizes the perpetual Hell within himself. Despairing, he addresses the Sun:

how I hate thy beams
 That bring to my remembrance from what state
 I fell, how glorious once above thy Spheare;
 Till Pride and worse Ambition threw me down
 Warring in Heav'n against Heav'ns matchless King:
 Ah wherefore! he deservd no such return
 From me, whom he created what I was
 In that bright eminence, and with his good
 Upbraided none; nor was his service hard.
 What could be less then to afford him praise,
 The easiest recompence, and pay him thanks,
 How due! yet all his good prov'd ill in me,
 And wrought but malice; lifted up so high
 I sdeind subjection, and thought one step higher
 Would set me highest, and in a moment quit
 The debt immense of endless gratitude,
 So burthensome, still paying, still to ow;
 Forgetful what from him I still receivd . . . (4.37–54)

Satan's words reveal his insincere motivations in perpetually opposing God. Significantly, Satan admits—directly contradicting his publicly spoken words to Abdiel—that he was created by God. This admission demolishes Satan's ontological grounding for rebellion against God and reveals his claims as fallacious and insincere; Bryson's defense that it is “only *after* losing” that Satan can conceive of “being a created being” (86, italics Bryson's) lacks any textual evidence and ignores the fact that the already-fallen and defeated Satan had, not long before his departure from Hell, announced to his followers that “the fixt Laws of Heav'n”—not God—“Did first create” him (2.18–19). The discrepancy between Satan's inflated projection of himself before his followers and his self-revealed condition in this scene invites comparison between Satan and Adam Smith's “vain man” who, “in the bottom of his heart, is very seldom convinced of that superiority which he wishes you to ascribe him” and who, consequently, “is *not sincere*” (255, italics mine). Satan's monologue also exposes as insincere Satan's earlier charge that God is tyrannical. Indeed, Satan here admits that God was good and fully worthy of his praise and obedience. Moreover, Satan acknowledges the insincere motives behind his rebellion and their role in his followers' downfall.

Although he considers repenting, he rejects repentance, disdaining submission to God and dreading shame before the angels he seduced (79–86).

A straightforward reading of this episode makes manifest Satan's insincerity throughout the epic. But Waldock defends Satan even here, arguing that his admission does not undermine his earlier glorious rhetoric. To accomplish this interpretive feat, Waldock charges that Milton the author has so thoroughly assaulted Satan's integrity that Satan is not the same character at all. Satan here "is not a development from the old, he is not a changed Satan, he is a *new Satan*" (82). The weakened Satan who addresses the Sun is not an organic development from the majestic Satan of earlier scenes. His "changes do not generate themselves from within: they are imposed from without. Satan, in short, does not degenerate: *he is degraded*" by Milton (83). For his part, Empson implicitly shies away from Waldock's strong assertion, but he suggests that the gap between Satan's previous grandeur and this scene is because "Milton was fitting in some old material" (*Milton's* 64). But such arguments are special pleading that betray their own interpretive desperation in light of the epic's stated goals. As Jonathon Shears (2009) demonstrates, both Waldock's and Empson's criticism display the "notoriously fragmentary" "Romantic aesthetic" that reads *Paradise Lost* according to selectively chosen excerpts instead of as a unified whole to be understood within the broader context of Milton's "great Argument" (1.24) (Shears 8). The same is true of Forsyth's and Bryson's more recent defenses of Satan.

Despite the obvious problems of romanticized defenses of Satan's sincerity in Eden in light of his aforementioned admissions, Empson actually argues for Satan's sincerity even when the hidden Satan, upon first seeing Adam and Eve, speaks of them as follows:

whom my thoughts pursue
 With wonder, and could love . . .
 . . . whom I could pittie thus forlorne
 Though I unpittied: League with you I seek,
 And mutual amitie so streight, so close,
 That I with you must dwell, or you with me
 Henceforth; my dwelling haply may not please
 Like this fair Paradise, your sense, yet such
 Accept your Makers work; he gave it me,
 Which I as freely give; Hell shall unfold,
 To entertain you two, her widest Gates,
 And send forth all her Kings. (362–63, 374–83)

I specifically quote only those lines that Empson quotes, after which Empson, perhaps building on Raleigh's belief in "the sincerity" of Satan's words here (Raleigh 139), suggests that "Satan might mean [the above] as a real offer" (*Some* 168), a notion Empson, writing in *Some Versions of Pastoral* (1935), grounds on the idea,

drawn from his then-held conviction that the newly “begot” Son had just been created, that “Satan believed [the Son of] God to be a usurping angel” (167). But even though Empson in *Milton’s God* omits this earlier misreading,⁹ he still thinks that readers should “take the offer as sincere” and believe Satan “probably” is “sincere when he offers high honour in Hell” (*Milton’s* 69). Empson now grounds his view on the idea that Satan, still considering God to be “intolerable”—largely because he suspects “that God is only waiting to turn all he does to torture”—also considers himself a kind of “patron of Adam and Eve, who can save them from their wicked master” who “has imposed upon them” “conditions of ignorance” (69). But once again Empson quotes Milton’s epic selectively. In neither of his books does Empson quote Satan blaming “him who puts me loath to this revenge / On you [Adam and Eve] who wrong me not” and who “compels me now / To do what else though damnd I should abhorre” (386–87, 391–92). Satan, from his own experience in hell, knows that the “entertainment” he offers will eternally torture the pair, and Milton’s narrator knows it too, commenting, “So spake the Fiend, and with necessity, / The Tyrants plea, excurs’d his devlish deeds” (393–94). But whereas Waldock and Empson see fit to silence Milton’s narrator, we do well to consider here his calling attention to Satan justifying his sin, for such fraudulent self-justification will also characterize the ensuing falls of Eve and Adam.

Eve’s Fall

The matter of Eve’s sincerity amid her fall into sin is arguably more complicated than that of Satan’s. Eve’s sin is precipitated by Satan’s rhetorical seduction when the lone Eve is met by Satan disguised as a serpent who claims he has been given reason and speech by eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil; and Eve being alone is the result of her unfortunate decision, for the sake of working more efficiently, to temporarily separate from Adam, a separation Adam agrees to despite first warning Eve that Satan is in Eden seeking their destruction. As many critics have noted, had Eve not left Adam’s presence, she would almost certainly have not succumbed to Satan’s rhetoric.¹⁰ But Milton’s text does suggest that Eve’s departure, however lacking foresight, was motivated by a sincere desire to work the garden more productively. At the same time, Milton’s text also suggests that Eve’s theological understanding, whatever her sincere motives, is already somewhat compromised by the time she leaves Adam, a factor that contributes to her spiritual vulnerability. Moreover, as Eve prepares to eat the forbidden fruit, and even more so when she encourages Adam to do likewise, she demonstrates, critical attempts to argue otherwise notwithstanding, a corruption of theology and intent that reveals her insincerity in both the senses that this essay has been discussing.

Space prevents an extensive analysis of Adam and Eve’s lengthy dialogue immediately preceding her departure.¹¹ But of particular interest is the narrator’s comment that Eve, hurt by Adam’s urgings that she stay with him lest she be vulnerable to Satan on her own, “thought / Less attributed to her Faith sincere” (9.319–20).¹²

It is most significant that Milton's narrator describes Eve's faith as "sincere"—a sincerity that falls under the category of "unfeigned honesty"¹²—because the couple's dialogue has earlier revealed that Eve, although still unfallen, has already strayed into theological error. Eve specifically speaks erroneously when, responding to Adam's initial misgivings concerning Eve's proposed departure, she objects, regarding Satan, that "His violence thou fearest not, being such, / As wee, not capable of death or paine, / Can either not receive, or can repell" (9.282–84). Eve's error—which Adam, to his loss, fails to specifically confront—is to say that she and Adam are "not capable of death or paine," a statement that contradicts God's commandment to Adam that if he eats of the Tree of Knowledge, he "shalt dye" (8.330).

Significantly, Eve can in the same scene first speak words of theological error that help propel her to her fatal encounter with Satan and then, a bit later, be described by Milton's narrator as having "faith sincere," even as Eve's theological purity appears to have slipped. Moreover, Milton's narrator explicitly stresses well into her subsequent temptation that Eve is "yet sinless" (9.659). And Milton takes pains not to depict Eve's unwise decision to depart from Adam as defiance. Rather, the confused and insecure Adam, having warned Eve of Satan's dangerous presence, actually urges Eve to "Go" in her "native innocence" and "relie" on her own "vertue" (9.373–74). Milton's narrator describes Eve as "yet submiss" as she departs, telling Adam that she leaves "With thy permission" (9.377–78).

But while Milton depicts Eve's departure as both unwise yet sincere, Eve, perhaps unexpectedly, demonstrates a strengthened theological sincerity even amid Satan's temptation, which begins shortly after she leaves Adam. When Satan, inhabiting the serpent, brings her to the Tree, although she is immediately intrigued by his speech and his flattery quickly makes inroads "Into" her "heart" (9.950), the "yet sinless" Eve, to her credit, initially protests eating from the Tree. She tells him, "God hath said, Ye shall not eate / Thereof, nor shall ye touch it, least ye die" (662–63). Remarkably, despite Satan's initial efforts, Eve here corrects her aforementioned theological slip.

Nonetheless, Eve continues to listen to Satan's relentless appeals. As Stanley Fish (2015) has recently argued, "even before she hears Satan's argument," Eve should ask, "What part of 'Ye shall not eat' (PL 9.662) don't you understand?" ("Milton" 7). But failing to do so, she is quickly overwhelmed by Satan's subsequent impassioned speech, a speech that derides God's injustice, extols the Tree's wondrous power, and implores Eve—whom Satan calls "Queen of this Universe" (684)—of her need to eat the Tree's fruit (679–732). The serpent's rhetorical power—grounded in his insincere claim that his ability to speak came from the fruit, of which he says he ate without dying—combined with Eve's physical hunger and the assault on her senses caused by the beautiful, delicious-smelling fruit, conspire against her previous adherence to God's command.

Significantly, Satan's speech—his final words in the temptation episode—is not immediately followed by Eve eating the fruit. Rather, Milton carefully precedes her eating—the act that marks her actual fall—with Eve's own lengthy speech to the Tree, a speech that strikingly resembles Satan's in its content, syntax, and attitude

toward God; a speech in which Eve justifies her choice to disobey God's clear command; a speech that demonstrates that her disobedience is a calculated decision, not a mistake made through an emotional and arguably sincere response to Satan's rhetoric. Crucially, Milton's narrator precedes Eve's speech as follows: "yet first / Pausing a while, thus to her self she mus'd" (9.743–44). Milton's diction makes clear the calculated aspect of Eve's sin. As Roy Flannagan (1998) observes, "Her pause signifies the difference between a completely careless act and one endorsed by thought. Thus she is culpable, because she has 'mus'd' about eating the fruit. Her sin is mortal, not venial" (608, note 223). Commenting on this same passage, Diane Kelsey McColley (1983) states that Eve muses "Idolatrously, hugging the lie"; her monologue is "the proof of her responsibility for" her own fall (205).

And Eve's calculated speech clearly endeavors—just as Satan's does—to undermine the legitimacy of God's command. Speaking to the Tree, Eve acknowledges that God "Forbids us then to taste" (9.753), but she baldly evades his prohibition with the following rationale:

but his forbidding
Commends thee more, while it inferrs the good
By thee communicated, and our want:
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 binde not. (753–60)

Eve's theological insincerity here is revealed by her blatant disregard of God's word in favor of accepting the words of a talking serpent. And the calculating logic she uses to validate this disregard reveals the implicit dishonesty of her words, words which allow her to persuade herself of the rightness of her desire to pursue "God-head" (790) through consuming the fruit. Indeed, the self-justifying insincerity of Eve's dishonest words demonstrates the theological insincerity of her rejection of God's word.

Eve's self-serving insincerity in eating the fruit has been noted by various critics, in addition to Flannagan and McColley, throughout the decades. Stopford A. Brooke (1879) writes that Eve's "curiosity becomes diseased desire, the desire of having her own way sets her into diseased contempt. . . The whole of her argument is nothing more than—"I wish it" (135). James Holly Hanford (1917) remarks that Eve's "vanity" (184) precipitates Eve's fall; E. M. W. Tillyard (1930) writes of Eve's "greed" (260); and C. S. Lewis (1942) writes that "Eve fell through Pride" (121). Michael Lieb (1970) contends that the "Already hungry" Eve "rationalizes her disobedience" (196); George Musacchio (1991) calls Eve's monologue "a generation within herself of evil concupiscence, a desire for what is forbidden" (159–60);

and Margaret Olofson Thickstun (2007) writes that Eve “chooses to believe” Satan’s argument, displaying a “capitulation to appetite” even as she “adopts Satan’s analytical response to the world” (153).

But despite this overall critical consensus, Eve has her prominent defenders. Waldock argues that the “bewildered” Eve “has no more chance of thinking out what the tempter is saying than most of us have detecting the flaws in what a bond salesman is telling us” (36). But Waldock’s argument—which does not acknowledge Eve’s considerable rational ability¹³—fails to acknowledge that one needn’t fully understand a crafty salesman’s pitch in order to reject it in the face of a clear divine command to reject what he sells. If Milton’s Eve were simply “bewildered,” she would have eaten the fruit without the long rationalizing speech Milton adds to the Genesis account. This objection to Waldock’s argument also helps rebut Shannon Miller’s 2008 contention that, because Eve’s senses are overwhelmed by the luscious appearance and smell of the apple and the sound of Satan’s voice, “her senses direct her, rather than her rationality” (163). Miller offers a false dichotomy. Certainly Eve’s sensory overload contributes mightily to her fall, but she does not eat the fruit until she rationalizes to herself the rightness of her choice to transgress God’s commandment. John Peter, in *A Critique of “Paradise Lost”* (1960) argues for Eve’s sincere intentions, averring that she eats the apple in order to be better company for Adam, who very recently had been “so enthralled” by conversation with the angel Raphael (see especially book 8). Peter argues that Eve knows that the fruit would expand “her own mental powers” and give her the opportunity “to be a better and more companionable wife than she had so far been, to replace Raphael himself” (122). But Peter’s argument has no textual support. As John Leonard (2013) notes in response to Peter, “Eve never so much as mentions Adam during the temptation” (*Faithful* 627). In *Milton’s God*, Empson defends Eve as an “independent-minded student,” and “if God is good” (and Empson strongly believes Milton’s God is not), “then he will love her for eating the apple; her solution of the problem will be correct because she has understood his intention” (160). More recently, in *Milton and the Natural World* (1999), Karen Edwards calls Eve a “new philosopher” (21) who demonstrates “the instincts of a Boylean witness” and whose “attitude perfectly combines experimental skepticism and open-mindedness” (36). But both Empson’s and Edwards’s arguments only strengthen the case against Eve’s sincerity in eating the fruit, for they ascribe to her a cerebral sophistication that places her and the serpent’s arguments over the plain command of God, a command explicitly reinforced by Raphael’s warnings.

After her transgression, Eve again displays insincerity while offering the fruit to Adam. After eating numerous apples, she praises the Tree (9.795–807) and calls God “Our great Forbidder” and his angels “all his Spies” (815), even as she wonders if they have seen her eating. She then ruminates about Adam:

But to *Adam* in what sort
Shall I appeer? shall I to him make known

As yet my change, and give him to partake
 Full happiness with mee, or rather not,
 But keep the odds of Knowledge in my power
 Without Copartner? so to add what wants
 In Femal Sex, the more to draw his Love,
 And render me more equal, and perhaps,
 A thing not undesireable, sometime
 Superior: for inferior who is free?
 This may be well: but what if God have seen
 And Death ensue? then I shall be no more,
 And *Adam* wedded to another *Eve*,
 Shall live with her enjoying, I extinct;
 A death to think. Confirm'd then I resolve,
Adam shall share with me in bliss or woe:
 So dear I love him, that with him all deaths
 I could endure, without him live no life. (816–33)

Eve's words display the twisted progress of her insincerity. Having first toyed with the idea of holding over Adam her allegedly superior wisdom and power, she is quickly motivated by fear of the God she recently disregarded to share the fruit with her husband. Eve's fear exposes the disingenuousness of her pre-fall musings. When she "mus'd" in anticipation of eating the fruit, she specifically argued away the idea that she would die from her eating, rationalizing that the serpent (who in fact never ate the fruit) "hath eat'n and lives" (764). Now she does not challenge the veracity of God's word; she only fears that he might have seen her and thus make good on his threat. Notably, any renewed sense that God's word may be true does not bring about repentance, a failure that suggests that, although Eve couches her words regarding Adam with the rhetoric of romantic devotion, the sincerity of her love for Adam is suspect indeed.

Eve's words to Adam urging him to eat compound her manifold insincerity. After undercutting God's command by saying, "This Tree is not as we are told" (863), and telling of the serpent who (she thinks) has eaten, lived, and gained reason and speech, she affirms that she has "grow[n] up to Godhead," an end, she claims, "which for thee / Chiefly I sought" (877–78). She concludes her speech to him as follows:

For bliss, as thou hast part, to me is bliss,
 Tedious, unshar'd with thee, and odious soon.
 Thou therefore also taste, that equal Lot
 May joyne us, equal Joy, as equal Love;
 Least thou not tasting, different degree
 Disjoyne us, and I then too late renounce
 Deitie for thee, when Fate will not permit. (879–85)

The difference between these lines and her recent soliloquy is striking. At the end of her soliloquy, the point where she firmly decides to share the fruit with Adam, she focuses on her fear that God will kill her and give him another wife. But nowhere in her speech to Adam does she mention any fear of death; she dismisses such concerns earlier (870), and here she emphasizes that they shall enjoy deity together if Adam eats, but that he shall be sadly unequal to her if he refrains. Eve demonstrates her insincerity by simultaneously concealing her intense fear of dying because of the fruit even as she urges Adam to consume it. Critics have sternly critiqued Eve's manipulation of Adam here. Brooke contends that Eve, "sick with jealousy" at the prospect of Adam receiving another wife, displays "the boldness of the woman who, having done wrong, and while the excitement of wrong continues, glories in her sin," appealing to Adam's "weakest point—Sin now, because you love me" (136). Most memorably, Lewis remarks that "the precise sin which Eve is now committing . . . is Murder" (121). But even here more than one major critic sides with Eve. After laughing off Lewis's charge of murder, Waldock writes, "It is not as if she knew exactly what death was"—a statement that avoids Eve's specific fear that she will die and be replaced—and avers that her overall attitude in this scene is characterized by "love, heroism, self-sacrifice" (63). And Peter continues to argue that Eve seeks to be a more complete wife to Adam (128). But Peter's contention ignores her earlier desires for power over Adam and avoids the inconsistencies between her speech to Adam and her previously stated fear of death. Indeed, the disagreement between critics on this matter is key to whether or not we consider Eve's intentions sincere. If her actions toward Adam are actually motivated by "love, heroism, and self-sacrifice," then she displays an authentic albeit tragic Romantic sincerity. But because she willingly offers Adam death in violation of God's command, she not only displays insincerity in the older, theological sense but she also falls short of a Romantic understanding of sincerity. No heroism or self-sacrifice is in view here; her desire for Adam to join her in death pulls him down at no additional cost to her. Disquietingly, Eve's self-justifying plot to have Adam accompany her descent into sin and death recalls the insincere self-justification Satan exercised when he rationalized his plot to "seek" "League with" Adam and Eve (4.375).

Adam's Fall

Like Eve's, Adam's own fall displays both theological insincerity and tainted motives covered over by rhetorical flourishes. Unlike Eve, however, Adam is not deceived by an outside agent; rather, the impetus for his fall is almost exclusively his systematic process of devaluing obedience to God in favor of a self-focused "love" for Eve. Adam's insincerity is not characterized by the malice displayed by Satan and Eve as they seek to bring others down to their fallen level. Rather, Adam's insincerity is that of a man who convinces himself that his disordered love for his wife—a love that is ultimately love for himself—is

the highest good. It is important to recognize, however, that Adam's project of self-deception is immediately preceded by his clear understanding, in spite of her deceptive rhetoric, of Eve's fallen condition, an understanding differentiated from Eve's failure to perceive the serpent's untruths. Recognizing immediately the tragic consequences of Eve's decision, he exclaims, "How art thou lost; how on a sudden lost, / Defac't, deflour'd, and now to Death devote?" (900–01). Whereas Eve sought to dismiss and avoid the matter of death, Adam addresses it clearly, accurately stating Eve's new relation to this horrific phenomenon. Adam also clearly identifies, without equivocation, Eve's sin against God's command: she has "yeelded to transgress / The strict forbiddance, . . . violat[ing] / The sacred Fruit forbidd'n!" (902–04). And Adam correctly surmises that Eve's alleged benefactor, the serpent, is an evil imposter: "som cursed fraud / Of Enemie hath beguil'd thee, yet unknown" (904–05). Although he has not yet identified the serpent as Satan, all these lines demonstrate that Adam's theological sincerity is still very much intact. Adam here objectively reaffirms God's single prohibition and laments both Eve's obvious transgression and its deadly outcome.

But Adam's theological purity and overall sincerity quickly give way when Adam shifts his focus from objective truth to his own agony in light of Eve's sinful condition. He follows his above observations with this lament:

And mee with thee hath ruind, for with thee
 Certain my resolution is to Die;
 How can I live without thee, how forgoe
 Thy sweet Converse and Love so dearly joy'n'd,
 To live again in these wilde Woods forlorn?
 Should God create another *Eve*, and I
 Another Rib afford, yet loss of thee
 Would never from my heart; no no, I feel
 The Link of Nature draw me: Flesh of Flesh,
 Bone of my Bone thou art, and from thy State
 Mine never shall be parted, bliss or woe. (906–16)

Crucially, when Adam declares his "Certain" resolution to die with Eve,¹⁴ he chooses, with his theological eyes wide open, solidarity with her over obedience to God. And he also explicitly chooses this transgressive loyalty over the possibility of God giving him another wife. In both these statements, Adam proclaims that he values his emotional link to Eve more than God's command and the wisdom of any alternative plan God might offer. Although Adam's deeply emotional determination to die with Eve appears to be the height of Romantic sincerity, his pretense of unmitigated devotion to Eve undermines his theological sincerity; moreover, Adam's emphasis on himself—evident throughout the above lines, including Adam stressing Eve's identity as "Flesh of Flesh, / Bone of my Bone"—reveals the faultiness of the critical contention, soon to be discussed, that Adam is here

preparing himself to make a noble sacrifice on Eve's behalf. Rather, as Stanley Fish (1967) observes, Adam absorbs Eve "into a love that is self-love" (*Surprised* 263). Adam's narcissistic attachment to Eve, whom he equates with "my self" before he eats the fruit, is in fact his insincere counterfeit of the self-giving love certain critics attribute to him.¹⁵

Lewis calls attention to the narrator's words that follow: that Adam here is "Submitting to what seemd remediless" (919). Focusing on the word "*seemd*" (italics Lewis's), Lewis notes that Adam never "interceded to God on [Eve's] behalf," and he speculates that, "For all Adam knew, God might have had other cards in His hand" (123). More recently, both Dennis Danielson (1989; "Through") and John Leonard (1990; *Naming* 217–19) have suggested that the still-unfallen Adam could have offered himself to die *for* Eve—an offer that God could have accepted and then followed by resurrecting the sinless Adam. This suggestion demonstrates the inadequacies of arguments that celebrate Adam's allegedly noble decision to die *with* Eve. Arguing that Adam dies "through true love" (52), Waldock even suggests that Adam's decision is Christ-like (60). Peter, again following Waldock, emphasizes what he calls Adam's "necessary and courageous sacrifice" (131). David Quint (2014) lauds Adam's alleged "heroic charity" (189). And Michael Bryson and Arpi Movesian (2017) extol Adam's "courage" because "Adam chooses a human life, a life of love rather than an existence of obedience" (499). These critical affirmations of Adam's fall, however, obscure the self-directed insincerity of his actions.

Adam's insincerity becomes increasingly evident during his second speech to Eve. After flattering her, he contradicts the accuracy of his original assessment of her situation by equivocating about the authenticity of God's prohibition. He says, "Perhaps thou shalt not Die, perhaps the Fact / Is not so hainous now" (9.928–29), offering the still-living and now rational and speaking serpent (no longer described as an "Enemie") as both evidence for his speculation and "inducement strong / To us, as likely tasting to attaine / Proportional ascent, which cannot be / But to be Gods, or Angels Demi-gods" (934–37). Adam's perverse logic here echoes Satan's words when he tells Eve "That ye should be as Gods, since I as Man, / Internal Man, is but proportion meet, / I of brute human, yee of human Gods" (710–12), a concept Eve communicates to Adam in less syllogistic form (see 865–77). Indeed, through his own reasoning, without having experienced Satan's rhetoric firsthand, Adam's thought becomes even more explicitly Satanic than Eve's. J. M. Evans's 1968 commentary on Adam's self-deception here notes the extent of his self-conscious insincerity. Evans argues that Adam "pretends" that achieving divinity is "a real possibility" (285). Like Eve, however, Adam should and likely does realize that this is delusional. Evans writes, "At the inward level both Adam and Eve recognize the probability that they will die if they eat the forbidden fruit; at the outward, however, they pursue what they both know to be the fiction that they will be raised to god-head" (286). Adam, despite knowing better, fails to correct Eve's deadly foray into fantasy; instead, he confirms it.

Adam's self-deceptive insincerity is accompanied by further degrading the sincerity of God's command. He reasons, "Nor can I think that God, Creator wise, / Though threatening, will in earnest so destroy / Us his prime Creatures" (9.938–40), a process of uncreation "Not well conceav'd of God" if God doesn't want to endure Satan's "Triumph" and mockery (see 941–52). Adam's suggestion that God will somehow rescind his word because of these factors further demonstrates how far Adam's theological compass has moved since his statements some fifty lines earlier. Indeed, Adam's words contradict Milton's own statement in *De Doctrina Christiana* regarding the trustworthiness of God's decrees in Scripture: There is "no changeableness either to God or to his decrees"; rather, any such "[c]hangeableness is wholly in those who abandon faith" (79). Milton goes on: "And the decree, beyond doubt, was of a piece with the decree's proclamation: but if not, we should be falsely imputing a certain wickedness to God, in that he was saying one thing with the mouth but hiding another beneath the breast" (81).¹⁶ This last sentence is particularly applicable to Adam's equivocation. In his own insincerity, he effectively accuses God of insincerity—where sincerity refers to self-representation when applied to God but refers to self-deception when applied to Adam.

Adam concludes his speech with lines that confirm his insincerity with regards to not only God's word but also Eve. He tells her,

However I with thee have fixt my Lot,
 Certain to undergoe like doom, if Death
 Consort with thee, Death is to mee as Life;
 So forcible within my heart I feel
 The Bond of Nature draw me to my owne,
 My own in thee, for what thou art is mine;
 Our State cannot be severd, we are one,
 One Flesh; to loose thee were to loose my self. (952–59)

In brief, Adam turns God's prohibition on its head: he embraces death—the penalty for transgression, the consequence to be most dreaded—as "Life," for, in "his idolatry" he makes self and union with Eve (a union he attributes to "Nature" instead of his Creator), justification to "break[] union with God" (Fish, *Surprised* 263). And Adam's romantic pretense of sacrifice is shown to be not a true sacrifice at all, for his death, unlike Christ's, is not efficacious; in his sin against God's command, he casts away any possibility that he might offer an efficacious sacrifice (Leonard, *Naming* 217–21), and his theological insincerity and insincere pretense of selfless love are what disqualify him.

Adam's second speech is followed by Eve's ecstatic and flattering reply, one that extols his "glorious trial of exceeding love" (961, see 961–89). The narrator, alluding to 1 Timothy 2:14, states that Adam ate "Against his better knowledge, not deceav'd, / But fondly [foolishly] overcome with Femal charm" (998–99). The narrator confirms what has been evident for some time: that Adam knew what

he was doing, that his motivation to die with Eve was motivated by foolish pretense, that his supposed heroism was the weakness of one who rejects God as his highest good. The insincerity of his choice of death is revealed when, after their ensuing lustful sex, the guilt-struck Adam blames Eve for his fall (1134–37, 1162–86).

Sincere Repentance

Adam's attitude of blame toward Eve continues even after the Son of God visits the fallen couple to judge, rebuke, and curse them (and the absent serpent) and to show divine mercy by covering them with animal skins (10.90–223). Adam's hostility is only halted when Eve responds to his accusations with humble supplication. Space prevents detailed discussion of Eve's tearful words, but her opening words are telling: "Forsake me not thus, Adam, witness Heav'n / What love *sincere*, and reverence in my heart / I beare thee" (10.914–16, italics mine). As Milton's word choice makes clear, Adam and Eve's reconciliation is marked by Eve's sincere love, a love that, so unlike the tragic romantic drama that characterized Eve's return to Adam in book 9, is untainted by pretense and deception. Significantly, however, Eve's sincere behavior in this scene is not accompanied by untainted theological understanding. She tells Adam that she wishes to receive God's wrath for both of them because she is the "sole cause of all this woe," and thus, she says, she only is the "just object of his ire" (935–36)—statements that, whatever the genuine attitude behind them, are not theologically accurate; rather, her words are sincere in their unfeigned honesty but fall short of sincere doctrine. Moreover, Eve suggests that she and Adam should either live childless or kill themselves now so that God's curse will not be visited on their descendants (979–1007), ideas that, though well intentioned, would improperly seek to subvert the divine curses given them even and undermine God's promise that Eve's seed will bruise the serpent's head (10.179–81).

But Adam, already won over by Eve's original sincere gesture, offers, by means of "his more attentive mind" (10.1011), a more theologically correct course of action, one based on renewed submission to the word of God, specifically the Son's words during his recent visitation. Recalling that God had said that Eve's "Seed shall bruise / The Serpent's Head" (1031–32), and surmising that the serpent is actually Satan, Adam gently argues against any course of action that, in preventing offspring, would forestall their prophesied "revenge" against Satan (1037) or cut them "off from hope" (1043). Instead, Adam counsels that they approach God in humble, contrite prayer. Book 10 ends with the first couple sincerely repenting, an act that brings about their reconciliation with God and the epic's sad but hopeful conclusion.¹⁷ Adam and Eve

forthwith to the place
Repairing where he judg'd them prostrate fell
Before him reverent, and both confess'd
Humbly thir faults, and pardon beg'd, with tears

Watering the ground, and with thir sighs the Air
 Frequenting, sent from hearts contrite, in sign
 Of sorrow unfeign'd, and humiliation meek. (1098–1104)

The couple's contrition here is in every way sincere: it emerges "from hearts contrite"; it is "unfeign'd"; and it is theologically pure, for in confessing, they are agreeing with God as they return to his word and repent of the disobedience against his word that marked their transgression. Their contrition is met by God's mercy and justice: their sins are forgiven, but they are expelled from Eden. Before they leave, Adam is instructed by the archangel Michael while Eve is taught in a dream, learning that the promised Seed is the divine-human Messiah and that obedience is the key to walking with God. As the weeping but hopeful pair depart Eden hand in hand, guided by Providence (12.645–49), knowing that their "wandering way will end at long last in the Promised Land" (Lewalski 278), there is implicit assurance that they have been restored to proper understanding of God and his ways; indeed, their sincere repentance has paved the way for their renewed theological sincerity, an integrity of belief that will be safeguarded by a life of sincere obedience.

Notes

*I would like to thank Calvin College, whose sabbatical support and Calvin Research Fellowship helped in the writing of this essay. Thanks to Joe Henderson, Matthew Smith, Caleb Spencer, and an anonymous reviewer for their helpful comments and suggestions on earlier drafts of this article. Thanks also to John Leonard and Cheryl H. Fresch, whose marvelous studies of the history of *Paradise Lost* criticism, listed below, directed me to a number of sources I discuss in this article.

1. Helpful recent surveys of the history of "sincerity" include Sinanan and Mines, and Magill.
2. This and all subsequent quotations from *Paradise Lost* are from *The Riverside Milton* (Flannagan).
3. Although Milton is known for his toleration of any Protestant (and even schismatic) Christian group that could back up its sincerely held theology with tangible biblical evidence, his understanding of theological sincerity is far different from James Boswell's 1764 account of his visit with Voltaire, which offers an early example of the Romantic usage of the word "sincere." In his visit, the Anglican Boswell, though having argued vehemently with the deist Voltaire on theological matters, is particularly impressed by Voltaire's "real sentiments" concerning religion: an honest "veneration" and "love" for "the Supreme Being" that "touched [Boswell's] heart" (2962, 2961). Having heard Voltaire's confession, Boswell recounts, "I was moved. I was sorry. I doubted his sincerity. I called to him with emotion, 'Are you sincere? are you really sincere?' He answered, 'Before God, I am'" (2962). Milton also differs from the modern attitude toward religion expressed, in a 1959 *Peanuts* comic strip, by Linus during an argument with Charlie Brown concerning the respective authenticity of the Great Pumpkin and Santa Claus. Linus concludes: "It doesn't matter what you believe so

long as you're sincere" (Schultz 130). Later, having been humiliated by the Great Pumpkin's failure to appear, Linus admits, "I was a victim of false doctrine" (Schultz 132). Linus's second quotation better captures the tragic consequences in *Paradise Lost* of eating from the forbidden Tree. The deceived Eve, in particular, is "a victim of false doctrine," although she is culpable for her chosen disobedience.

4. Raphael narrates much of book 5 and all of books 6 and 7. Other references to Milton's narrator in this essay refer to Milton's own narrative voice. For a developed discussion of Raphael's reliability as a narrator, see Cyr. See also Thickstun 105–18.
5. Waldock's challenge to Milton's narrator is developed by Forsythe 77–113.
6. *De Doctrina Christiana (Christian Doctrine)* was discovered in 1823 and first translated into English in 1825. Although chapter 5 articulates an Arian view that denies the eternal existence of the Son of God, it nonetheless holds that the Son is the creator of all other beings. The most thorough discussion of *Christian Doctrine's* relation to *Paradise Lost* is Kelley. For a thorough discussion of the work's theology, see Bauman. For a sustained challenge to Milton's authorship, see Hunter. Hunter's challenge has not generally been accepted. See especially Campbell et al. But see also Sullivan, who does not find Campbell et al.'s conclusions convincing.
7. See, for example, Peter 66 and Bryson 85. My discussions of Grierson in this paragraph and of Bagehot, Raleigh, and Saurat in previous paragraphs are indebted to Leonard (*Faithful* 425–26, 431, 434, and 440–41).
8. The remainder of this paragraph restates information just published in my otherwise laudatory review of *The Value of Milton*.
9. Curiously, Empson in 1935 was still utilizing the discredited reading of "begot" as "created," arguing that Abdiel's words that the Son helped create the angels was "in flat contradiction with V. 603" (*Some* 167). But Empson, who likely was unaware of Grierson's 1926 review, backed away from this position in *Milton's God*, which cites Grierson's *Milton and Wordsworth*.
10. Low 35; Evans 273; Revard 73; Danielson (*Milton's* 127); and Fish (*How* 533) each argue that Adam would have done well to either insist or more forcefully urge Eve to not separate from him.
11. I offer such analysis in chapter 7 of *Milton and the Parables of Jesus*.
12. Significantly, the *OED* uses this passage to exemplify the following definition of "sincere": "3. Containing no element of dissimulation or deception; not feigned or pretended; real, true."
13. McColley 170–80 and Pruitt 63–67 discuss Eve's rational ability.
14. Swinden notes that here Adam's purposive syntax imitates both Satan's rhetoric throughout the epic and Eve's self-justifying speech just before she eats the forbidden tree (371).
15. See Urban, "The Lady," 14–15 for a discussion of Adam's narcissistic attraction to Eve, and 22–23 for various critical discussions of this topic.
16. John Carey's less accurate translation of this sentence is, "Without doubt the decree as it was made public was consistent with the decree itself. Otherwise we should have to pretend that God was *insincere [improbitatem]*, and said one thing but kept another hidden in his heart" (177, italics mine).
17. Whittington demonstrates how Adam and Eve's repentant supplication and reconciliation in book 10 imitate the Son's words and actions on various levels.

Works Cited

- Bagehot, Walter. *Literary Studies*. Vol. 1. 2nd ed. Ed. Richard Holt Hutton. London: Longmans, 1879.
- Ball, Patricia M. "Sincerity: The Rise and Fall of a Critical Term." *Modern Language Review* 59.1 (1964): 1–11.
- Bauman, Michael. *Milton's Arianism*. Frankfurt: Lang, 1987.
- Boswell, James. "[Boswell Interviews Voltaire]." *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 9th ed. Vol. C. Stephen Greenblatt, gen. ed. New York: Norton, 2012. 2960–62.
- Brooke, Stopford A. *Milton*. 1879. London: Macmillan, 1902.
- Bryson, Michael. *The Tyranny of Heaven: Milton's Rejection of God as King*. Newark: U of Delaware P, 2004.
- and Arpi Movesian. *Love and Its Critics: From the Song of Songs to Shakespeare and Milton's Eden*. Cambridge: Open Books Publishers, 2017.
- Campbell, Gordon, Thomas N. Corns, John K. Hale, and Fiona J. Tweedie. *Milton and the Manuscript of "De Doctrina Christiana"*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007.
- Clementine Homilies*. In *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 8. Ed. Cleveland Cox. Buffalo, NY: 1886. 215–346. Accessed at <http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/coxe-ante-nicene-fathers-volume-8>.
- Cyr, Marc D. "The Archangel Raphael: Narrative Authority in Milton's War in Heaven." *The Journal of Narrative Technique* 17.3 (1987): 309–16.
- Danielson, Dennis. *Milton's Good God: A Study in Literary Theodicy*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1982.
- . "Through the Telescope of Typology: What Adam Should Have Done." *Milton Quarterly* 23.3 (1989): 121–27.
- Edwards, Karen L. *Milton and the Natural World: Science and Poetry in "Paradise Lost"*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999.
- Empson, William. *Milton's God*. 1961. Rev. ed. London: Chatto & Windus, 1965.
- . *Some Versions of Pastoral*. 1935. London: Chatto & Windus, 1950.
- Evans, J. M. *"Paradise Lost" and the Genesis Tradition*. Oxford: Clarendon P, 1968.
- Fish, Stanley. *How Milton Works*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap/Harvard UP, 2001.
- . "Milton and Interpretation." *Milton Studies* 56 (2015): 3–16.
- . *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in "Paradise Lost"*. 1967. 2nd ed. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1998.
- Flanagan, Roy, ed. *The Riverside Milton*. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1998.
- Forsythe, Neil. *The Satanic Epic*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2003.
- Fresch, Cheryl H. *A Variorum Commentary on the Poems of John Milton*. Vol. 5, Part 4: *Paradise Lost*, Book 4. Ed. P. J. Klemp. Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 2011.
- Grierson, Herbert J. C. *Milton and Wordsworth, Poets and Prophets: A Study of Their Reactions to Political Events*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1937.
- Rev. of Denis Saurat, *Milton: Man and Thinker*. *Modern Language Review* 21.1 (1926): 440–42.
- Hanford, James Holly. "The Dramatic Element in *Paradise Lost*." *Studies in Philology* 14 (1917): 178–95.
- Hunter, William B. *Visitation Unimplor'd: Milton and the Authorship of "De Doctrina Christiana"*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 1998.
- Ide, Richard S. "On the Begetting of the Son in *Paradise Lost*." *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 24.1 (1984): 141–55.

- Kelley, Maurice. *This Great Argument: A Study of Milton's "De Doctrina Christiana" as a Gloss upon "Paradise Lost"*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1941.
- Leonard, John. *Faithful Labourers: A Reception History of "Paradise Lost," 1667–1970*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013.
- . *Naming in Paradise: Milton and the Language of Adam and Eve*. Oxford: Clarendon P, 1990.
- . *The Value of Milton*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2016.
- Lewalski, Barbara Kiefer. *"Paradise Lost" and the Rhetoric of Literary Forms*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1985.
- Lewis, C. S. *A Preface to "Paradise Lost"*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1942.
- Lieb, Michael. *The Dialectics of Creation: Patterns of Birth & Regeneration in "Paradise Lost"*. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1970.
- Low, Anthony. "The Parting in the Garden in *Paradise Lost*." *Philological Quarterly* 67 (1968): 30–35.
- Magill, R. Jay, Jr. *Sincerity*. New York: Norton, 2012.
- McColley, Diane Kelsey. *Milton's Eve*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1983.
- Miller, Shannon. *Engendering the Fall: John Milton and Seventeenth-Century Women Writers*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2008.
- Milton, John. *Christian Doctrine*. The Complete Prose Works of John Milton, vol. 6. Ed. Maurice Kelley. Trans. John Carey. New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1973.
- . *De Doctrina Christiana*. The Complete Works of John Milton, vol. VIII. Ed. and trans. John K. Hale and J. Donald Cullington. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012–.
- Musacchio, George. *Milton's Adam and Eve: Fallible Perfection*. New York: Lang, 1991.
- Oxford English Dictionary* (online). Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000–.
- Peter, John. *A Critique of "Paradise Lost"*. New York: Columbia UP, 1960.
- Pruitt, Kristin A. *Gender and the Power of Relationship: "United as One Individual Soul" in "Paradise Lost"*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 2003.
- Quint, David. *Inside "Paradise Lost": Reading the Designs of Milton's Epic*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2014.
- Raleigh, Walter. *Milton*. 1900. New York: Blom, 1967.
- Revard, Stella P. "Eve and the Doctrine of Responsibility in *Paradise Lost*." *PMLA* 88.1 (1973): 69–78.
- Saurat, Denis. *Milton: Man and Thinker*. New York: Dial P, 1925.
- Schultz, Charles M. *The Complete Peanuts: 1959 to 1960*. Seattle, WA: Fantagraphics Books, 2006.
- Shears, Jonathon. *The Romantic Legacy of "Paradise Lost": Reading against the Grain*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2009.
- Shelley, Percy Bysshe. *Shelley's Prose or The Trumpet of Prophecy*. Ed. David Lee Clark. Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P, 1954.
- Sinanan, Kerry, and Tim Milnes. "Introduction." *Romanticism, Sincerity and Authenticity*. Ed. Tim Milnes and Kerry Sinanan. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. 1–28.
- Smith, Adam. *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Ed. D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1982.
- Sullivan, Ernest. Rev. of Campbell, Gordon, Thomas N. Corns, John K. Hale, and Fiona J. Tweedie, *Milton and the Manuscript of "De Doctrina Christiana"*. *Review of English Studies* 60.243 (2009): 153–54.

- Swinden, Patrick. "Doing God's Will: Motives, Intentions and the Characters of *Paradise Lost*." *Literature & Theology* 12.4 (December 1998): 363–78.
- Thickstun, Margaret Olofson. *Milton's "Paradise Lost": Moral Education*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.
- Tillyard, E. M. W. *Milton*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1930.
- Trilling, Lionel. *Sincerity and Authenticity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1972.
- Urban, David V. "The Lady of Christ's College, Himself a 'Virgin Wise and Pure': Parabolic Self-Reference in John Milton's *Sonnet IX*." *Milton Studies* 47 (2008): 1–23.
- . *Milton and the Parables of Jesus: Self-Representation and the Bible in John Milton's Writings*. University Park: Penn State UP, 2018 (forthcoming).
- . Rev. of John Leonard, *The Value of Milton*. *Modern Philology* 115.2 (November 2017): E83–86.
- Waldock, A. J. A. *"Paradise Lost" and Its Critics*. 1947. Gloucester, MA: Smith, 1959.
- Whittington, Leah. "Milton's Poetics of Supplication." *Milton Studies* 55 (2014): 113–45.

Author biography

David V. Urban is Professor of English at Calvin College. His book *Milton and the Parables of Jesus* is forthcoming from Penn State University Press. He also co-edited *Visionary Milton* (Duquesne UP) and co-compiled and co-edited *John Milton: A Bibliography: 1989–1999* (Duquesne UP). His articles on Milton have appeared in journals such as *Milton Quarterly*, *Milton Studies*, and *Studies in Philology*.