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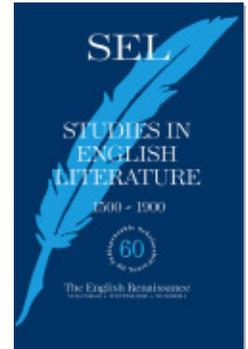
## Milton's Tutelary Angels

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# Milton's Tutelary Angels

JAMES ROSS MACDONALD

In the notebook now known as the Trinity Manuscript, Milton made four sketches for a tragic drama based on the biblical account of the Fall. While each prefigures certain aspects of *Paradise Lost*, it is the last, entitled “Adam Unparadized,” that most directly anticipates episodes of the mature epic. Written in prose, this version begins as the angel Gabriel, sent to Earth “to keep his watch in Paradise after Lucifer’s rebellion by command from God,” encounters an angelic chorus. At their request, Gabriel “relates what he knew of man,” and, after the repulse of the devil from the garden, “the Chorus sings of the battle, and victory in heaven against him and his accomplices, as before after the first act was sung a hymn of the creation.”<sup>1</sup> In *Paradise Lost*, these projected choral songs become the description of the war in heaven, extensively recounted by Raphael to Adam in books 5 and 6, and the account of creation that fills book 7. The second angelic embassy of *Paradise Lost* also appears in a different form in “Adam Unparadized,” in which, after Adam and Eve are “seduced by the serpent,” an “angel is sent to banish them out of Paradise but before causes to pass before his eyes in shapes a masque of all the evils of his life and world[:] he is humbled[,] relents, despairs. At last appears Mercy[,] comforts him[,] promises the Messiah, then calls in Faith, Hope, and Charity, instructs him[:] he repents[,] gives God the glory, submits to his penalty[:] the Chorus briefly concludes.”<sup>2</sup> Books 11 and 12 of Milton’s finished epic conform closely to this narrative arc, but the allegorical figures of Mercy, Faith, Hope, and Charity have been displaced from Adam’s anagnorisis, allowing Michael both to admonish and console him.

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Undoubtedly such changes originated in the shift of genre as well as in Milton's own evolving theological ideas, but it is striking that he has reassigned some of the poem's most important interactions to individual angels in a way that emphasizes their personal agency. This pattern intersects with a persistent early modern religious concern over the nature of the angels' scripturally attested role as "ministring spirits, sent forthe to minister, for their sakes which shalbe heires of saluation" (Heb. 1:14).<sup>3</sup> On one hand, Protestant religious enthusiasm stimulated a renewed consideration of angelic service; as Peter Marshall and Alexandra Walsham observe, angels formed "an integral part of the providential world view ... in which not a single sparrow perished or hair fell without the Lord's knowledge, permission and active intervention."<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, however, reformed theologians often expressed anxiety concerning the patristic tradition of the guardian angel, wary that such personalized relations might slip into idolatry or impinge upon Christ's unique office as mediator. Milton's angelology has recently received extended critical appraisal from Feisal G. Mohamed and Joad Raymond.<sup>5</sup> However, the tutelary office has attracted less attention, perhaps because in *Paradise Lost* Milton deprecates individual guardianship in favor of collective protection: in "The Argument" to book 10, it is only to Gabriel's brigade as a whole that the name of "guardian angels" is assigned, a pluralized form that Milton suggests will continue for Adam's posterity by comparing Michael's glorious transit to Earth to the vision of "Jacob in Mahanaim, where he saw / The field pavilioned with his guardians bright."<sup>6</sup> But rather than severing the bonds between the inhabitants of heaven and earth, the poem's division of tutelary tasks among many angels sheds new light on the central Miltonic themes of order, obedience, and autonomy. Instead of exercising control over inferiors or acting as exclusive distributors of grace, Milton's angels offer an affective dimension of the poem's theodicy through fellowship and voluntary service, as much to Adam and Eve themselves as to the readers. The angels' collaborative acts of protection and correction, undertaken at divine bidding, present a sociable, even familial, vision of the cosmos while sidestepping the characteristic Satanic error of interposing authorities between creatures and a God who remains, as Charles W. Durham observes, "the only absolute ruler in the poem."<sup>7</sup>

From the beginning of Milton's career, the guardian angel exerted an evident fascination, but the guises in which such figures appear in his early works vary considerably. In "On the Death of a

Fair Infant Dying of a Cough" (ca. 1625–26), Milton asks whether the child herself might have been one of the "golden-winged host" who labor

To slake his wrath whom sin hath made our foe  
 To turn swift-rushing black perdition hence,  
 Or drive away the slaughtering pestilence,  
 To stand 'twixt us and our deserved smart?<sup>8</sup>

Such an ambitious job description probably partakes of the poem's atmosphere of hyperbole, in which the speaker promises the bereaved mother that her next child will perpetuate her name "till the world's last end."<sup>9</sup> *A Masque Presented at Ludlow Castle* (1634), by contrast, offers a more restrained depiction of guardianship in the Attendant Spirit. In keeping with the drama's classical pneumatology, he calls himself only one of the "bright aerial spirits," but his presence on earth seems to corroborate the Lady's claim that "the Supreme Good" would "send a glistening guardian if need were / To keep my life and honour unassailed."<sup>10</sup> Angelic place-patronage plays a key role in the consolatory thrust of "Lycidas" (1637), where the drowned swain is appointed "genius of the shore," amplifying Milton's earlier reference to St. Michael's Mount as "the guarded mount."<sup>11</sup> Milton's most overt yet least earnest engagement with the doctrine comes in the Latin poem "Ad Leonoram Romae Canentem" (To Leonora Singing at Rome) (ca. 1638–39), where the speaker punctuates his assertion that each individual possesses an angelic guardian with an exhortation to believe: "Angelus unicuique suus (sic credite gentes) / Obtigit aethereis ales ab ordinibus."<sup>12</sup> In light of this universal accompaniment, Milton goes on to claim that the sublime quality of Leonora Baroni's voice shows that she enjoys greater, and perhaps even divine, companionship.

Milton's youthful poems, concludes Stephen M. Fallon, "do not indicate any specific angelological stance."<sup>13</sup> By the time he composed *De Doctrina Christiana*, however, his ideas about guardianship had clearly become more methodical and systematic, seemingly in dialogue with John Calvin's revolutionary angelology. Calvin's approach urges restraint against theological conjectures, criticizing the "empty speculations which idle men have taught apart from God's Word concerning the nature, orders, and number of angels" and enjoining Christians to remain content in the knowledge imparted by scripture.<sup>14</sup> This principle of reticence, in turn, produces a rupture with church tradition as Calvin declines

to take a firm position on “whether individual angels have been assigned to individual believers for their protection.”<sup>15</sup> Although he concedes that the book of Daniel “signifies that specific angels have been appointed as guardians over kingdoms and provinces” and that Matthew’s Gospel suggests there are “certain angels” to whom believers’ “safety has been committed,” Calvin finds the topic is best avoided altogether:

Yet it is not worth-while anxiously to investigate what it does not much concern us to know. For if the fact that all the heavenly host are keeping watch for his safety will not satisfy a man, I do not see what benefit he could derive from knowing that one angel has been given to him as his especial guardian. Indeed, those who confine to one angel the care that God takes of each one of us are doing a great injustice both to themselves and to all the members of the church; as if it were an idle promise that we should fight more valiantly with these hosts supporting and protecting us round about!<sup>16</sup>

Calvin anchors his model of angelic protection in scripture by recasting a common proof text for angelic guardianship: when an angel unexpectedly frees St. Peter from jail only for his surprised friends to mistake Peter himself for “his Angel” (Acts 12:15), Calvin finds that this liberator may be “any angel at all to whom the Lord had then given over the care of Peter; yet he would not on that account be Peter’s perpetual guardian.”<sup>17</sup>

As historians have shown, Calvin’s views came to occupy a mainstream position within the English church. In his influential *A Golden Chaine* (1591), William Perkins acknowledges “[t]hat there are degrees of angels, it is most plaine ... But it is not for vs to search, who, or how many be of ech order, neither ought we curiously to enquire howe they are distinguished, whether in essence, or qualities.”<sup>18</sup> Perkins declines to address individual guardianship, putting him at the center of what Marshall calls “a broad functional consensus among Elizabethan theologians that belief in guardian angels was, at best, a very uncertain opinion; at worst, a toxic relic of popery.”<sup>19</sup> Such personalized relations, finds Laura Sangha, “were presumed to encourage the likelihood of a person falling into idolatry, and went against the Protestant emphasis on heavenly creatures as agents of God’s providence and extensions of his will.”<sup>20</sup> Yet this new orthodoxy did not prevail universally, even among committed Protestants. “Whether

euery man hath his peculiar Angell, I dare not certainly affirme,” writes the clergyman John Salkeld in 1613, since “there appeareth no firme ground out of the Scripture, for such an assertion.”<sup>21</sup> Nonetheless, he finds that “many, euen Protestants, thinke the affirmatiue part to be the truth,” on the basis of scriptural suggestion and “the common consent of both the ancient Greeke and Latine Church.”<sup>22</sup> Toward the middle of the century, the theologian Henry Lawrence, the “virtuous father” of Milton’s friend Edward Lawrence, maintained a firm belief in guardian angels along with impeccable Puritan credentials: after a spell in Holland, he returned to serve in Parliament and became president of the Council of State from 1653 to 1659.<sup>23</sup> In *Of Our Communion and Warre with Angels* (1646), Henry Lawrence moves well beyond Calvin to find it “probable” that a human being has a “proper and peculiar Angell deputed as his keeper and companion,” although at times “extraordinarily many may be sent to his ayde.”<sup>24</sup> But, observes Raymond, Henry Lawrence works to fit angelic guardianship into Calvin’s theological system by rendering it “conformable to the doctrine of predestination,” arguing that “it is cleare that the tutelage of the good Angells, belongs onely to the elect ... Exclusively, that is, to them and no others,” serving both as “a priviledge, and prerogative to the saints.”<sup>25</sup>

Some reflection of this last doctrine appears fleetingly in *Paradise Lost* in the Father’s declaration that while all who heed conscience may “safe arrive” at salvation, some have been “chosen of peculiar grace / Elect above the rest,” since one of the perquisites of the latter group seems to be extraordinary angelic protection (3.197 and 183–4). In book 2, Milton describes how Sin and Death construct a bridge from hell over which

the spirits perverse  
With easy intercourse pass to and fro  
To tempt or punish mortals, except whom  
God and good angels guard by special grace.

(2.1030–3)

Yet, on the whole, the presentation of tutelary angels in both *Paradise Lost* and *De Doctrina Christiana* appears much more compatible with Calvin’s approach than Henry Lawrence’s.<sup>26</sup> In his theological tract, Milton finds suggestion in scripture “that angels are put in charge of nations, kingdoms and particular districts” and that “seven of them particularly patrol the earth,” but he declines to go further.<sup>27</sup> Though Milton does not overtly

renounce the possibility of persistent individual guardianship, Robert H. West points out that a Calvinist caution is "put into Raphael's mouth against Adam's too curious questions," when the angel warns him that

heaven 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.

(8.172–6)<sup>28</sup>

As a poet, Milton himself observes the same circumspection, implicitly rejecting the best-known patristic accounts of the angels' hierarchy and, by extension, its relation to their ministry. When Calvin reproves "empty speculations" about angelic life, his central target is the fifth-century treatise *De Coelesti Hierarchia* by an author who comes to be called Pseudo-Dionysius.<sup>29</sup> Attributed until the Renaissance to Dionysius the Areopagite, the man converted by St. Paul in Acts 17, this influential work schematized the scriptural names for angels into nine ranks, or three sets of three, whose hierarchy was defined by their proximity to God.<sup>30</sup> Thus the seraphim, cherubim, and thrones held the highest positions; dominions, virtues, and powers comprised the middle ranks; and principalities, archangels, and angels, whose tasks were concerned with the guidance of earthly states and individuals, rated lowest. Rather than proceeding from the Pseudo-Dionysian assumption that every scriptural name refers to a different angelic type, however, Calvin interprets the names of the orders as functional, even temporary designations given according to the context and character of the angels' activities: because God "exercises and administers his authority in the world through them, they are sometimes called principalities, sometimes powers, sometimes dominions."<sup>31</sup> When scripture refers to them as gods, it is only "because in their ministry as in a mirror they in some respect exhibit his divinity to us."<sup>32</sup>

Milton follows a similar logic when he writes in *De Doctrina Christiana* that angels "are distinguished one from another by their duties and their ranks," opening new signifying possibilities for angelic terminology in *Paradise Lost*.<sup>33</sup> While Mohamed argues that Milton inverts the traditional Pseudo-Dionysian hierarchy, a pattern of non-Pseudo-Dionysian usage accords well with many examples from the poem.<sup>34</sup> Raphael, for example, is described as

a “seraph” and, less than a hundred lines later, as an “angelic virtue,” as well as an “affable archangel” (5.277, 5.371, and 7.41). By investing Raphael with overlapping names from each Pseudo-Dionysian triad, Milton implies rejection of the Pseudo-Dionysius’s concomitant doctrine that only the bottom classes of angels would involve themselves in human affairs and, more broadly, of the idea that all creatures interact directly only with those holding adjacent hierarchical positions. Moreover, Milton also affirms in his theological tract that angelic embassies occur under many guises, even without any overt signal that mediation is taking place, since the “name of God seems to have been attributed to the angels chiefly because they were sent from heaven bearing the likeness of the divine glory and person and, indeed, the very words of God.”<sup>35</sup> Such unobtrusive activity is perhaps most fully realized within *Paradise Lost* through Michael’s description of the crossing of the Red Sea, where God will be

present in his angel, who shall go  
 Before them in a cloud, and pillar of fire,  
 By day a cloud, by night a pillar of fire,  
 To guide them in their journey, and remove  
 Behind them, while the obdurate king pursues.

(12.201–5)

This account closely reproduces the narrative of Exodus 13, but Michael’s understanding of the cloud as signifying angelic presence expresses Milton’s own distinctive view in *De Doctrina Christiana*, where he argues that “what Jehovah is said to have spoken in Exodus was really spoken not by him but by angels in his name.”<sup>36</sup> In fact, Milton writes that “anyone can observe throughout the whole of the Old Testament ... that angels often take upon them as their own the name, the person and the very words of God and Jehovah. Also an angel sometimes assumes the person and the very words of God, even without taking the name of Jehovah or God, but with the name of an angel only, or even of a man.”<sup>37</sup> No act of angelic personation quite so dramatic occurs in the epic, yet angelic visits reflect what Thomas A. Copeland terms Raphael’s “habitual self-effacement.”<sup>38</sup> Neither Raphael nor Michael reveals his personal name to Adam over the course of their visits, although perhaps the poem itself shows inconsistency on this point: by book 11 Adam seems to have learned the identity of his first visitor, judging that his second will not be “sociably mild / As Raphael” (11.234–5). But in recounting the valiant

deeds of angelic combatants in the war in heaven, including his own in the third-person, Raphael indirectly offers a rationale for this reticence:

I might relate of thousands, and their names  
 Eternize here on earth; but those elect  
 Angels contented with their fame in heaven  
 Seek not the praise of men.

(6.373–6)

Such modesty serves to protect his inferiors from any inclination toward an idolatrous confusion of the majestic ambassador with the invisible sovereign. But unlike Jacob, who asks the name of the angel with whom he wrestles in Genesis 32 and receives no answer, Adam's unfallen sense of decorum evidently prevents the question from arising at all.

The dialectic of hierarchical power and humble restraint certainly characterizes the inward life of angelic society within *Paradise Lost*. C. S. Lewis argues that the theme of hierarchy constitutes "the indwelling life of the whole work, it foams or burgeons out of it at every moment," and it is reified in the structure of heaven itself, as the narrator avers that Mulciber's

hand was known  
 In heaven by many a towered structure high,  
 Where sceptred angels held their residence,  
 And sat as princes, whom the supreme king  
 Exalted to such power, and gave to rule,  
 Each in his hierarchy, the orders bright.

(1.732–7)<sup>39</sup>

More than external forms of courtesy, these ranks are revealed to be the shaping force of angelic social relations when Satan, in disguise as what "The Argument" to book 3 terms "a meaner angel," hypocritically bows to Uriel, "As to superior spirits is wont in heaven" (3.737). Such degrees of deference are clearly a public matter, since Raphael describes the meeting in heaven at which the Son is begotten in terms of hieratic display:

Under their hierarchs in orders bright  
 Ten thousand thousand ensigns high advanced,  
 Standards, and gonfalons twixt van and rear

Stream in the air, and for distinction serve  
Of hierarchies, of orders, and degrees.

(5.587–91)

Given the large number of angels whom he leads, Satan must certainly be among these dignitaries, though evidently one of many: the narrator also gives the epithet of hierarch to both Raphael and Michael (5.468 and 11.220), while Michael also holds the office “of celestial armies prince” and the fallen angel Nisroc is described as “of principalities the prime” (6.44 and 447).

But while Milton shows clearly that the angels’ own internal organization is hierarchical, it is much less clear whether he extends that principle to encompass all of the diverse forms of rank, order, and kind within the created universe. For Lewis, *Paradise Lost* fully embraces a worldview in which “degrees of value are objectively present in the universe. Everything except God has some natural superior; everything except unformed matter has some natural inferior. The goodness, happiness, and dignity of every being consists in obeying its natural superior and ruling its natural inferiors. When it fails in either part of this twofold task we have disease or monstrosity in the scheme of things until the peccant being is either destroyed or corrected.”<sup>40</sup> Yet though the poem continually exhibits the virtue and value of voluntary obedience, instances of superiors governing inferiors are not so pervasive. God rules over all of creation unconditionally, Adam possesses delegated authority over Eve, and humanity receives “over beast, fish, fowl / Dominion absolute”; yet the angels, by contrast, do not rule human beings despite their superiority in strength and intelligence but obey God alongside them (12.67–8). The orthodox angelic attitude, according to Raphael, is to regard Adam as “our fellow servant” (8.225), a verbal echo of the angel who admonishes St. John for offering him worship (Rev. 22:8–9). Similarly, Abdiel’s resistance serves to demonstrate that even within a strict hierarchy, subordinates need not rely upon their superiors for hierophantic access to the divine. In place of the Pseudo-Dionysian “economy of *theurgia* whereby divine illumination descends through the angels,” Abdiel’s successful, licit rejection of Satan’s intermediate authority shows that both angels and human beings are accountable to God independently.<sup>41</sup> Though orderly and ceremonious, angels seem to enjoy considerable latitude for autonomous action without raising the specter of disobedience: when Satan, in disguise as a cherub, presents his search for Earth to Uriel as arising from an “unspeakable desire

to see, and know / All these his wondrous works, but chiefly man," the archangel warmly approves his initiative (3.662–3). Perhaps Milton's creation is best conceived in terms of heterarchy, an ordered system whose elements nonetheless "possess the potential for being ranked in a number of different ways" and in which relations are structured by patterns "of shared or counterpoised power," rather than top-down control.<sup>42</sup> As John P. Rumrich observes, among the angels, formal boundaries consistently "provide points of connection and synergy rather than demarcations of trespass."<sup>43</sup> Indeed, cooperation between angels often plays an important role in the performance of their allotted tasks: after discovering Satan's fraud by observing him "disfigured, more than could befall / Spirit of happy sort" on Mt. Niphates, Uriel makes use of the sun's rays to come to earth and warn Gabriel, precipitating the search that ultimately uncovers the devil's whereabouts (4.127–8).

In this case, of course, the angels' collaboration has transmitted information among themselves yet added nothing to the sum of heavenly knowledge, since the Father is already aware of everything that has transpired. Despite underscoring the angels' substantial freedom and abilities, Milton also clearly acknowledges the limitations of their custodial capacity, since God himself "is nearer and kinder to us than any of the saints or angels either are or can be."<sup>44</sup> Constraints on angelic will and power are frequently confirmed within *Paradise Lost* by the angels themselves, as Gabriel clearly perceives the futility of confronting the devil without divine sanction:

Satan, I know thy strength, and thou knowst mine,  
Neither our own but given; what folly then  
To boast what arms can do, since thine no more  
Than heaven permits, nor mine, though doubled now  
To trample thee as mire.

(4.1006–10)

Nor are such restrictions kept secret from humanity, since Raphael tells Adam that the combatants in the war in heaven would have caused greater damage had not God "from his stronghold of heaven high overruled / And limited their might" (6.228–9). Moreover, Milton insists that even the most penetrating minds do not enjoy infallible knowledge similar to the Son's, remaining adamant that "good angels do not see into all God's thoughts ... They know by revelation only those things which God sees fit to

show them, and they know other things by virtue of their very high intelligence, but there are many things of which they are ignorant."<sup>45</sup> Even though Uriel is "held / The sharpest sighted spirit of all in heaven," he cannot initially detect Satan's fraudulent disguise, while Michael enters combat with Satan erroneously "hoping here to end / Intestine war in heaven" (3.690–1 and 6.258–9). Although Adam and Eve suggest that the angels "best can tell" the glory of God because they see him continually, ultimately Raphael can offer only preterition (5.160): "What words or tongue of seraph can suffice, / Or heart of man suffice to comprehend?" (7.113–4). Nor is angelic apprehension of the divine will instantaneous, since when the Son proposes the atonement in response to the Father's foreseeing of the Fall, the angels are initially incapable of understanding its true significance: "Admiration seized / All heaven, what this might mean, and whither tend / Wondering" (3.271–3). Thus the Father must offer special preparation for Michael's mission, instructing him to communicate to Adam "what shall come in future days, / As I shall thee enlighten" (11.114–5). Perhaps the same mechanism must be tacitly assumed to account for Raphael's knowledge of the intimate conversations of Satan and his party, which he recounts verbatim to Adam during books 5 and 6.

Such limitations define the scope and nature of angelic interactions with their human clients. In *De Doctrina Christiana*, Milton affirms that it is "forbidden to pray to angels and saints," identifying a characteristic Catholic error in their invocation and de facto worship, a practice that relies on "subterfuges," which "are all quite worthless."<sup>46</sup> Moreover, he emphasizes that their earthly ministry is fundamentally disinterested by disputing any assertion that "good angels now maintain their position not so much by their own strength as by the grace of God."<sup>47</sup> The implication of this claim, that the angels themselves are subject to election and reprobation, is firmly rejected: although "angels take great pleasure in examining the mystery of man's salvation," they do so "simply out of love, and not from any interest of their own," since "they are reckoned as being under Christ because he is their head, not their Redeemer."<sup>48</sup> By disavowing any suggestion that guardian angels might be driven by a self-interested ulterior motive, Milton presents a possible connection with the angelology of Henry Lawrence, who seemingly literalizes the meaning of Raphael's name—God heals—in analogizing guardian angels to medical practitioners: "But they are often with us as Phisitions are with those who have filthy ulcers, they stop their noses, &

administer the medicine, so doe they, our vanity & sins extreamely offend them, as it doth God, yet their obedience to God and Love to us, keepes them steddily to us, though in our ill waies, wee are no waies pleasant to them."<sup>49</sup> Unfallen Adam would be a far more agreeable companion for Raphael than most humans would be for their own guardians, but for Henry Lawrence the custodial task is borne more for the sake of duty than desire. Such a therapeutic, even dispassionate vision of angelic companionship may furnish context for the apparent detachment of the angels in *Paradise Lost* when they receive news of the Fall of Man: "dim sadness did not spare / That time celestial visages, yet mixed / With pity, violated not their bliss" (10.23–5). Indeed, Milton makes plain that even the angels most intimately involved in Edenic life are not primarily actuated by personal considerations: God instructs Raphael to converse with Adam "as friend with friend," and Gabriel's office as "Chief of the angelic guards" is shown to be contingent on the divine will, since, as Uriel points out, the protective office is his "by lot" (5.229, 4.550, and 4.561).

It is Satan, by contrast, whose intense emotional involvement with Eve and her descendants enacts a malign parody of traditional angelic guardianship, perhaps evoking the "medieval notion that a person had an *evil* designated angel, seeking to tempt a person into sin."<sup>50</sup> Unlike their angelic counterparts, the devils relate to humanity in terms of anxiety and self-interest. Satan conjectures that the "upstart creatures" have been brought into being in order "to supply / Perhaps our vacant room, though more removed, / Lest heaven surcharged with potent multitude / Might hap to move new broils" (2.834–7). This view of Adam and Eve as potential replacements and rivals becomes a ubiquitous feature of Satan's rhetoric, reducing the significance of human life to a gloss on the devils' own situation. In disguise, the devil repeats the same rationale to Uriel, claiming that after the angels' revolt, God "to repair that loss / Created this new happy race of men / To serve him better" (3.678–80), and he goes on to develop this line of thinking to account for the inferiority of these new creatures to angels, attributing the creation of humans to God's wish

to be avenged,  
 And to repair his numbers thus impaired,  
 Whether such virtue spent of old now failed  
 More angels to create, if they at least  
 Are his created, or to spite us more,  
 Determined to advance into our room

A creature formed of earth, and him endow,  
 Exalted from so base original,  
 With heavenly spoils, our spoils.

(9.143–51)

Yet at the same time, Satan's disdainful resentment is cross-hatched with jealousy and desire. He casts his intentions toward humanity in terms of growing intimacy: "league with you I seek / And mutual amity so strait, so close, / That I with you must dwell, or you with me / Henceforth" (4.375–8). Unlike the equanimity of the loyal angels, Satan's response to Adam and Eve is filled with sensual disturbance. In the manner of a thwarted lover, he experiences both pain and pleasure in the presence of Adam and Eve, as the devil's "eyes with grief behold ... whom my thoughts pursue / With wonder, and could love," and when the couple embraces, "aside the devil turned / For envy" (4.358, 362–3, and 502–3). Even as Satan, in the form of the serpent, plots his solicitation, the effect of Eve's beauty leaves him "abstracted ... From his own evil, and for the time remained / Stupidly good, of enmity disarmed" (9.463–5). Without positively committing himself, Milton loosely suggests the tradition of diabolic sexual desire attributed to Asmodeus, who murders the successive husbands of Sara in the book of Tobit, and to the "Sons of God" whose relations with human women produce the *nephilim*, or giants, of Genesis 6.<sup>51</sup> Yet Satan's apparent cathexis can yield no satisfaction: while the good angels are "wont to meet / So oft in festivals of joy and love," and practice the "union of pure with pure / Desiring," he bemoans that his "fierce desire, / Among our other torments not the least, / Still unfulfilled with pain of longing pines" (6.93–4, 8.627–8, and 4.509–11).

Satan's temptation of Eve combines these two registers, mixing the will to power with implicit erotic neediness. When the devil claims that Eve should be "adored and served / By angels numberless, thy daily train," he repurposes as mocking flattery his own earlier observation that angelic protection constitutes the degrading reversal of celestial hierarchy in mankind's favor, as God "subjected to his service angel wings, / And flaming ministers to watch and tend / Their earthy charge" (9.547–8 and 155–7). At his northern stronghold, by contrast, Satan tells his followers that it is their "imperial titles which assert / Our being ordained to govern, not to serve" (5.801–2). Through fixation on the hierarchical dignities that the good angels modestly downplay in their dealings with human beings, it is the devils alone,

Durham suggests, who behave as if their "titles were indicative of value" rather than responsibility or office.<sup>52</sup> Although some of Milton's contemporaries, such as his friend Henry Vane the Younger, suggested that human beings had been elevated above the angels, either through grace or through Christ's decision to unite the godhead to human rather than angelic nature, *Paradise Lost* never allows the question of priority to surface before the Fall in any form apart from Satan's own psychological projections, both in soliloquy and in Eve's directed dreaming.<sup>53</sup> Indeed, even as Adam's assertion that Eve's beauties "create an awe / About her, as a guard angelic placed" betokens a potential inversion of human hierarchy, it implicitly reaffirms Adam's respectful deference to the angels (8.558–9).

After tasting the fruit, of course, Adam and Eve set their sights on upward mobility as they "fancy that they feel / Divinity within them breeding wings / Wherewith to scorn the earth" (9.1009–11). This fall into a state of mind akin to Satan's own brings an estrangement from the angels, which parallels Adam's and Eve's separation from each other and from God. Raphael's description of the angelic host as the "eyewitnesses of his almighty acts" recurs bitterly in Eve's complaint against "our great forbinder, safe with all his spies / About him," suggesting the medieval commonplace that a guardian angel would testify to his client's sins at the Last Judgment (6.883 and 9.815–6).<sup>54</sup> Adam, by contrast, comes to take what would seem to Calvin an inappropriate interest in the details of angelic hierarchy: as Michael arrives to deliver his message, Adam uses the angel's stately appearance to make conjectures about his rank in heaven, "whether among the thrones, or named / Of them the highest" (11.296–7). And, tellingly, he also appears to be wrong: while Michael is traditionally identified as an "archangel" and also described by Milton as an "archangelic power," only Adam associates him with the order of thrones (12.466 and 11.126). Milton lays special stress on the changed relationship between humanity and the angels by showing that it is the angels who act to disturb the course of nature, from moving the sun and orienting the planets and winds to disrupt the earth's original idyllic weather in book 10 to the destruction of the garden by fire at the end of book 12. Looking back at Paradise, Adam and Eve can see only the angels' "dreadful faces ... and fiery arms," completing the process of alienation (12.644). In light of this rupture, however, one of Milton's aims within *Paradise Lost* appears to be recuperative, evoking through poetic imagination a sense of the angel as "familiar" that has been

occluded by the Fall (9.2). In a 1630 tract, the preacher Nicholas Byfield presents angelic companionship as the perfection of earthly friendship:

Who would be withheld from *the congregation of the first borne, from the societie with innumerable Angels, and the spirits of iust men?* Alas! the most of vs haue not so much as one entire and perfect friend in all the world; and yet wee make such friends as we haue, the ground of a great part of the contentment of our liues. Who could liue here, if he were not beloued? Oh, what can an earthly friendship bee, vnto that in heauen; when so many thousand Angels & Saints shall be glad of vs, and entertaine vs with vnwearied delight! If we had but the eyes of faith to consider of this, we would thinke euery houre a yeere till we were with them.<sup>55</sup>

As Rebecca Buckham observes, heaven and earth are both “like and unlike each other,” and so the relationship between angels and human beings is structured by the coexistence of affinity and alterity.<sup>56</sup> While the angels furnish Adam and Eve with a model of creaturely obedience toward which they might aspire, they simultaneously render visible the underlying social fabric of the universe that the poem’s readers inhabit.

Although Milton’s treatment of angelic substance was fraught with radical implications, his presentation of angelic guardianship adhered to some of the most discreet strands of Protestant thinking, embracing Calvin’s revisionist angelology even as his growing commitment to free will swept aside much of the Calvinist grounding of his early works. One simple reason for this avoidance of heterodoxy is that angelic activity, for all its epistemological significance and implicit political resonance, seldom became a topic of heated dispute within Christianity. Walsham argues that angels were “never the major flashpoint in the debates about image-making and image-breaking,” playing instead a “ubiquitous but ancillary” role in late medieval and early modern Christian iconography.<sup>57</sup> Angels were frequently added to medieval representations of biblical scenes and the lives of the saints, finds Sangha, since “even when not explicitly mentioned, it seems that it was natural for artists and authors to assume the angelic presence and depict them regardless.”<sup>58</sup> Perhaps to a certain extent, the same logic must hold true for Milton as well, since the representation of angels was intrinsic to the subject

matter of his poem, as well as furnishing him with natural figures for the *nuntii* of epic tradition.<sup>59</sup>

Yet vital theological issues remained at stake in Milton's presentation of angelic ministry. Although *Paradise Lost* feelingly emphasizes the affection of angels and shows their fraternal assistance and intervention at work in the world, Milton follows Calvin in dividing the traditional role of the guardian angel into discrete tasks, all harmonized and orchestrated by God alone. Seventeenth-century proponents of angelic guardianship, such as the Protestant clergyman Robert Dingley, could argue that it would be reasonable to assume that Adam enjoyed personal angelic protection even before the Fall, since although "there was an Harmony within yet there were Tempters without," going on to suggest that it may have been Adam's angelic guardian who "peradventure counselled him when he had sinned to hide and cloath himself: Glorious was the Communion between man in Innocency and Elect Angels."<sup>60</sup> Milton would concur with this last sentiment, but his Adam receives the former counsel from the Son directly, who is surely right in telling the Father that grace, rather than any angel, is the "speediest of thy wingèd messengers / To visit all thy creatures" (3.229–30). As West points out, Milton excludes from *Paradise Lost* the cabbalistic tradition that unfallen Adam received the tutelage of the angel Raziel; instead, Adam is furnished counsel by "two different angels sent to him for two different jobs."<sup>61</sup> This approach accentuates the degree of moral responsibility that Adam himself and his descendants must bear, as his companionship with Eve becomes an existential challenge precisely because its intensity and exclusivity have no parallel in his relations with angels.

## NOTES

I am grateful for comments from William Engel, John Gatta Jr., David Scott Kastan, Pamela Royston Macfie, Kelly Malone, Lawrence Manley, David Quint, John Rogers, and Brian Walsh as this article developed through many drafts.

<sup>1</sup> Milton, "Adam Unparadized," in *Paradise Lost*, ed. Alastair Fowler, rev. 2d edn., Longman Annotated English Poets, gen. ed. John Barnard and Paul Hammond (Harlow UK: Longman, 2007), pp. 2–3, 3.

<sup>2</sup> Milton, "Adam Unparadized," p. 3. The bracketed punctuation is supplied by Fowler.

<sup>3</sup> All biblical quotations are from *The Geneva Bible: A Facsimile of the 1560 Edition* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1969).

<sup>4</sup> Peter Marshall and Alexandra Walsham, "Migrations of Angels in the Early Modern World," in *Angels in the Early Modern World*, ed. Marshall and Walsham (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2006), pp. 1–40, 14–5.

<sup>5</sup> See Feisal G. Mohamed, *In the Anteroom of Divinity: The Reformation of the Angels from Colet to Milton* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2008); and Joad Raymond, *Milton's Angels: The Early-Modern Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2010).

<sup>6</sup> Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 10.Arg and 11.214–5. Subsequent references to *Paradise Lost* are to the Longman edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text by book and line number.

<sup>7</sup> Charles W. Durham, "To stand approv'd in sight of God': Abdiel, Obedience, and Hierarchy in *Paradise Lost*," *MiltonQ* 26, 1 (March 1992): 15–20, 16.

<sup>8</sup> Milton, "On the Death of a Fair Infant Dying of a Cough," in *Complete Shorter Poems*, ed. John Carey, 2d edn., Longman Annotated English Poets, gen. ed. Barnard (Harlow UK: Longman, 1997), pp. 14–8, lines 57 and 66–9.

<sup>9</sup> Milton, "On the Death of a Fair Infant," line 77.

<sup>10</sup> Milton, *A Masque Presented at Ludlow Castle*, in *Complete Shorter Poems*, pp. 173–234, lines 3, 216, and 218–9.

<sup>11</sup> Milton, "Lycidas," in *Complete Shorter Poems*, pp. 237–56, lines 183 and 161.

<sup>12</sup> Milton, "Ad Leonoram Romae Canentem" (To Leonora Singing at Rome), in *Complete Shorter Poems*, pp. 257–8, lines 1–2. Carey translates these lines as follows: "A winged angel from the heavenly ranks—believe me, you nations—has been allotted to each particular individual" (*Complete Shorter Poems*, p. 258).

<sup>13</sup> Stephen M. Fallon, *Milton among the Philosophers: Poetry and Materialism in Seventeenth-Century England* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1991), p. 166.

<sup>14</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, vols. 20 and 21 of *The Library of Christian Classics*, gen. ed. John Baillie, McNeill, and Henry P. Van Dusen, 26 vols. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953–66), 20:164.

<sup>15</sup> Calvin, 20:167.

<sup>16</sup> Calvin, 20:167–8.

<sup>17</sup> Calvin, 20:167.

<sup>18</sup> William Perkins, *A Golden Chaine, or The Description of Theologie containing the Order of the Causes of Salvation and Damnation, according to Gods Woord* (London: Edward Alde, 1591), B5v–6r; EEBO STC (2d edn.) 19657.

<sup>19</sup> Marshall, "The Guardian Angel in Protestant England," in *Conversations with Angels: Essays towards a History of Spiritual Communication, 1100–1700*, ed. Raymond (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 295–316, 298.

<sup>20</sup> Laura Sangha, *Angels and Belief in England, 1480–1700* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2012), p. 141.

<sup>21</sup> John Salkeld, *A Treatise of Angels* (London: Thomas Snodham, 1613), R6v; EEBO STC (2d edn.) 21621. For a discussion of these passages and Salkeld's background as a former Roman Catholic, see Marshall, "The Guardian Angel in Protestant England," pp. 298–9.

<sup>22</sup> Salkeld, R6v.

<sup>23</sup> Milton, "Sonnet 17," in *Complete Shorter Poems*, pp. 343–4, line 1. For Henry Lawrence's life, see Timothy Venning, "Lawrence, Henry, appointed Lord Lawrence under the protectorate (1600–1664), politician," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, published 23 September 2004, last modified 3 January 2008, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/16178>.

<sup>24</sup> Lawrence, *Of Our Communion and Warre with Angels* (London: Giles Calvert, 1646), C2v; EEBO Wing L666.

<sup>25</sup> Raymond, p. 59; and Lawrence, C2r. For further discussion of Lawrence's views, see Sangha, pp. 108–10; and Marshall, "The Guardian Angel in Protestant England," pp. 302–3.

<sup>26</sup> One area of disagreement, however, concerns the timing of the angels' creation: while Milton believes that the angels preexisted the material world, Calvin suggests that it is "evidence of stubbornness rather than of diligence to raise strife over the time and order in which they were created" (20:163–4). See Milton, *Two Books of Investigations into Christian Doctrine Drawn from the Sacred Scriptures Alone*, trans. Carey, ed. Maurice Kelley, in ca. 1658–ca. 1660, ed. Kelley, vol. 6 of *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, ed. Don M. Wolfe et al., 8 vols. (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1972), pp. 125–807, 313.

<sup>27</sup> Milton, *Christian Doctrine*, p. 346. As Carey notes, this belief is also reflected in *Paradise Regained*, where Jesus speaks of "angels president / In every province" (Milton, *Paradise Regained*, 1.447–8, in *Complete Shorter Poems*, pp. 424–512, 441n).

<sup>28</sup> Robert H. West, *Milton and the Angels* (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1955), p. 101.

<sup>29</sup> Calvin dismisses the work of Pseudo-Dionysius, "whoever he was," as being "for the most part nothing but talk. The theologian's task is not to divert the ears with chatter, but to strengthen consciences by teaching things true, sure, and profitable" (20:164).

<sup>30</sup> For an account of Pseudo-Dionysius's angelology and its reception history, see Mohamed, pp. 3–9, as well as his summary table on p. 24.

<sup>31</sup> Calvin, 20:165.

<sup>32</sup> Calvin, 20:165.

<sup>33</sup> Milton, *Christian Doctrine*, p. 315.

<sup>34</sup> Taking as interpretive cornerstones Satan's high station in heaven, his clear identification as an archangel, and the evident lower rank of the seraph Abdiel, Mohamed suggests that by "promoting the ministerial Archangels to the top of his angelic hierarchy, and demoting the Seraphim and Cherubim to the bottom, Milton creates a heaven where the enactment of divine will is the highest creaturely calling" (p. 112). Raymond, by contrast, argues that Milton largely disregards Pseudo-Dionysian tradition, pointing out that Milton's assertion in the *Reason of Church Government* that the angels "are distinguished and quaternioned into their celestial Princedomes, and Satrapies" distances him, even from an earlier stage of his career, from the Pseudo-Dionysian ternions (*Reason of Church Government*, ed. Wolfe, in *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, 1:745–861, 752. See Raymond, p. 55).

<sup>35</sup> Milton, *Christian Doctrine*, pp. 236–7.

<sup>36</sup> Milton, *Christian Doctrine*, p. 251.

<sup>37</sup> Milton, *Christian Doctrine*, p. 256.

<sup>38</sup> Thomas A. Copeland, "Raphael, the Angelic Virtue," *MiltonQ* 24, 4 (December 1990): 117–28, 123.

<sup>39</sup> C. S. Lewis, *A Preface to Paradise Lost* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1954), p. 78.

<sup>40</sup> Lewis, p. 72.

<sup>41</sup> Mohamed, p. 91. Milton thus rejects an angelological tradition that suggests that if a single member of an angelic order fell, then all others would follow. West locates a representative example of this viewpoint in the contradictory additions to Reginald Scot's *Discoverie of Witchcraft* by the unknown author, "Anti-Scot" (see p. 65).

<sup>42</sup> Carole L. Crumley, "Heterarchy and the Analysis of Complex Societies," *Archeological Papers of the American Anthropological Association* 6, 1 (January 1995): 1–5, 3. Raymond concludes that since "actions generate moral status rather than reflect it," Milton's universe "depends on flexible hierarchies" (p. 263).

<sup>43</sup> John P. Rumrich, *Milton Unbound: Controversy and Reinterpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996), p. 123.

<sup>44</sup> Milton, *Christian Doctrine*, p. 694.

<sup>45</sup> Milton, *Christian Doctrine*, pp. 347–8.

<sup>46</sup> Milton, *Christian Doctrine*, pp. 694–5. Calvin shares this belief about the intercession of angels, asserting that "as God does not make them ministers of his power and goodness to share his glory with them, so he does not promise us his help through their ministry in order that we should divide our trust between them and him" (20:172).

<sup>47</sup> Milton, *Christian Doctrine*, p. 343.

<sup>48</sup> Milton, *Christian Doctrine*, pp. 344–5.

<sup>49</sup> Lawrence, C3v.

<sup>50</sup> Sangha, p. 162.

<sup>51</sup> As Raymond notes, Milton's approach to this interpretive tradition appears inconsistent (see pp. 76–7): while Michael's narrative in book 11 takes the "Sons of Gods" to be the virtuous human descendants of Seth, in *Paradise Lost* Belial is identified as the leader of the "lusty crew, / False titled Sons of God" (2.178–9). West, on the other hand, argues that the epithet "False titled" itself "means that Belial is not a son of God and should not be confused with sons of God, though like those sons of God who were Seth's, he did couple with daughters of men" (p. 130).

<sup>52</sup> Durham, p. 16. For Rumrich, the devils are the poem's true authoritarians: paralyzed by their hopeless state, they "occupy themselves instead with niceties of place and status, with boundary and limit, and observe the externals of distinction with punctilious grandiosity or servility" (p. 126).

<sup>53</sup> For Henry Vane the Younger's beliefs, see Mohamed, pp. 98–104. Raymond surveys several other contemporary theological discussions of this question in *Milton's Angels* (see pp. 83–4). Fallon points out that Milton recorded in his *Commonplace Book* St. John Chrysostom's belief that a "good man by some reckoning seems to surpass even the angels," since he must overcome greater obstacles to attain holiness (*Commonplace Book*, in *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, 1:326–513, 364; see Fallon, p. 84). For the persistence of this view in New England, see John Gatta Jr., "Little Lower than God: The Super-Angelic Anthropology of Edward Taylor," *HTR* 75, 3 (July 1982): 361–8.

<sup>54</sup> See Sangha, p. 34.

<sup>55</sup> Nicholas Byfield, *The Marrovv of the Oracles of God* (London: John Legatt, 1630), GG10v–1r; EEBO STC (2d edn.) 4222.

<sup>56</sup> Rebecca Buckham, "Milton's Strange Angels," in *Milton, Materialism, and Embodiment: One First Matter All*, ed. Kevin J. Donovan and Thomas Festa (Pittsburgh PA: Duquesne Univ. Press, 2017), pp. 111–36, 133.

<sup>57</sup> Walsham, "Angels and Idols in England's Long Reformation," in *Angels in the Early Modern World*, pp. 134–67, 134.

<sup>58</sup> Sangha, p. 22. At the same time, however, angels were not exempt from iconoclastic fervor. The very first entry in the records of William Dowsing, commissioned by the Earl of Manchester to remove decorations from the churches of East Anglia in 1643–44, describes his work in the chapel of Cambridge University's Peterhouse, recording the destruction of "two mighty great angells, with wings, and divers other angells," as well as "about a hundred chirubims and angells" (*The Journal of William Dowsing: Iconoclasm in East Anglia during the English Civil War*, ed. Trevor Cooper [Woodbridge UK: Boydell, 2001], pp. 155–6). For an account of Dowsing's career, see Walsham, "Angels and Idols in England's Long Reformation," pp. 159–61.

<sup>59</sup> The convention of the *nuntius* or divine messenger and its many variations are examined in Thomas M. Greene, *The Descent from Heaven: A Study in Epic Continuity* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1963).

<sup>60</sup> Robert Dingley, *The Deputation of Angels, or, The Angell-Guardian* (London: T. R., 1653), H5v–6r; EEBO Wing (2d edn.) D1496. For further discussion of Dingley, see Sangha, pp. 110–2; and Marshall, "The Guardian Angel in Protestant England," pp. 303–5.

<sup>61</sup> West, p. 132.