Degrees of Knowing: Agency and Epistemology in Milton's Paradise Lost

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DEGREES OF KNOWING: AGENCY AND EPISTEMOLOGY
IN MILTON’S PARADISE LOST

by

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B.A., Colgate University, 2015

A thesis submitted to the
Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Colorado in partial fulfillment
of the requirement for the degree of
Master of Arts
Department of English

2019
This thesis entitled:
Degrees of Knowing: Agency and Epistemology in Milton’s Paradise Lost
written by Mikhaila Redovian
has been approved for the Department of English

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The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.
The moral implication of wisdom, knowledge, and humankind’s fate after the fall of man
is one of the major occupations of the poet John Milton in his epic poem *Paradise Lost.*
Influential arguments from scholars such as Stanley Fish propose that there is a temporal and
moral binary exemplified in the action of the poem, divided between a pre and post-lapsarian
position. I will here complicate this binary, suggesting that Adam and Eve’s development
throughout the epic shows a more progressive evolution than has been considered previously.
Because of this developmental progress, I also suggest that Milton presents a complex moral
vision of knowledge or wisdom. Instead of condemning curiosity and knowledge, Milton argues
for a cautious and contemplative approach to each, while also affirming that wisdom is a
necessity to living a Christian life.
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Introduction

Throughout his epic poem *Paradise Lost*, John Milton recounts the familiar biblical tale of Adam and Eve’s fall from grace while also embellishing the narrative with the anxieties of his time. In addition to trying to accomplish something “unattempted yet in prose or rhyme,” Milton’s poem suggests both the lasting impact of the rise of humanistic thought, and its decline. Many historicist readings of the text record the anxieties associated with the era’s turn toward empiric knowledge, the search for absolute truth, and the lost certitudes of the humanist era. At a time when the definition of the term “curiosity,” as well as the moral rectitude of knowledge seeking, was in flux, the text’s ability to cast a long shadow over these topics cannot be overstated.

Not only does Milton’s poem recount the biblical creation story, his embellishments refract and change many aspects of a rather skimpy source text. The implication of Milton’s adornment of the familiar tropes from Genesis provides insight into how truth and knowledge were moralized at the decline of humanism and the outset of empiricism. Because of the long reach of the poem, Milton’s interpretations impact how these topics continue to be moralized today. This moralization of study, empirical fact, and curiosity is especially pressing in the context of Adam and Eve, God’s best creations and his first representations of the race of humanity that would follow them. As Milton’s text vacillates between condemning Eve’s quest for new information as an overreach of her position, and lionizing her transformation into an experienced being as the path to redemption, it obscures a conclusive judgment about the morality of her quest for knowledge. However, further investigating Adam and Eve’s knowledge
seeking clarifies that curiosity is the only effective epistemology allowing the pair enough agency to navigate the world outside of Eden. This is in sharp relief with the more passive and “wondrous” epistemologies that define the characters at the beginning of the poem.

As a retelling and adaptation of the story of Adam and Eve, *Paradise Lost* primarily focuses on transformation. Undifferentiated matter becomes Heaven, Hell, and Pandaemonium, the Garden of Eden shifts from Paradise to exile, and Adam and Eve transform from innocence to experience. In keeping with this theme, an important aspect of Adam and Eve’s epistemology is the fact that it changes over the course of the text. *Paradise Lost* has often been considered either a generative, or a regenerative text, and both terms characterize the lack of stasis within the poem. This trend toward regeneration and “dynamism” written into the Fallen world has been noted both in terms of the Milton’s linguistic choice, and in terms of Adam and Eve’s development and redefinition of their sense of self (Gimelli-Martin, 7; Robertson, 62). It is this thread of inquiry that I hope to take up here, exploring the ways that Adam and Eve develop more complex epistemologies, inner lives, and eventually agency as they prepare for their inevitable expulsion from Eden.

What I propose here is a deeper analysis of Milton’s treatment of the Christian creation myth, with particular attention to the ways in which human agency develops over the course of the poem, through the lens of epistemology. I will suggest that both Adam and Eve begin their own journeys as dependent figures lacking true agency. Situated within a poem in which nothing can remain static, these characters must develop a fuller agency in order to navigate their changing circumstances, each developing their own epistemology, thereby moving into a more complex state of being. In the transition from innocence to temptation and eventually to experience, Adam and Eve display their evolving sense of agency through changing
epistemology. As each shifts through the various states of agency, I propose, Adam and Eve move from the questioning of others to self-questioning and finally through rational thought. By making these transitions, Adam and Eve prepare themselves for life in a newly fallen world, while also providing space for the possibility of redemption.

Finally, because Adam and Eve develop their more complex epistemologies, agencies, and selves only through their fall from God’s grace, I will contrast their development and eventual redemption in comparison to another fallen being. As the first and farthest-fallen creature encountered within the epic, Satan presents an important comparison point for the two human heroes of the poem. I will argue that it is Satan’s lack of development in addition to his commitment to sin that makes him irredeemable. Thus, Satan becomes a spectral figure who continues to experience more of the world without recognizing the consequences of these experiences or gaining the ability to integrate new information with old. This is an important comparison point for Adam and Eve, because in their case an outsized curiosity ends in redemption. Though curiosity arguably ends up toppling all three characters, it is only Adam and Eve who can turn their curiosity into their saving grace. In this characterization, Milton avoids condemning curiosity, instead favoring a learned approach to the pursuit of knowledge.

Because of the development of each character throughout the poem, it follows that my analysis will follow the somewhat chronological nature of the text. Each of Adam and Eve’s various epistemologies is expressed in discrete temporal locations, and I will attempt to maintain these distinctions. However, because Milton’s epic traces various accounts and recounts of the narrative it will be important to delineate between each of these temporal periods. For the purposes of this project, I will define periods based on a Pre-Fall epistemology, a temptation epistemology, and a Post-Fall epistemology. This methodology will trace the development of
Adam and Eve’s agency as they shift their epistemology in response to their changing circumstances in the world.
Chapter I: Pre-Fall Epistemology

While the first few books of the epic are dedicated to the war in heaven, Satan’s casting out from Heaven, and the establishment of Chaos, Pandaemonium and Eden, the text shifts its focus to Eden in Book IV. The reader is first exposed to the “two far nobler shapes” as they appear to Satan’s eye (Book IV, 288). Here, Milton slows his narration, taking the time to introduce Adam and Eve and exploring their personalities and epistemologies in the tightly bounded temporal space before Satan tempts them. Because of its appearance at the beginning of the human-dominated portion of the text, as opposed to a wholly reconstructed narrative told later, and because of the depth with which Milton depicts both humans, Book IV is where I suggest that Milton outlines Adam and Eve’s “Pre-Fall epistemology.” Pre-Fall epistemology can be characterized by the sense of dependence that both Eve and Adam display. It is the starting point from which each character eventually grows, and is associated with innocence, limitation, and dependence upon others to construct knowledge. Since Adam and Eve begin the poem with simple epistemologies that later develop into more complex methods of knowledge building, it is vital to understand how each begins their journey toward experience. As each begins to build a more elaborate epistemology, the agency required to continue this construction also increases. Thus, I use epistemology as a barometer of agency, and elucidate how both Adam and Eve develop significantly from their humble beginnings. While both of the characters display a similar epistemology here, one that is dominated by asking questions of others, there are enough differentiating qualities to necessitate discussing each as an individual. Because Eve is the first character to recount her story, and the first to ask questions, I will begin my analysis with Eve before discussing Adam.
Eve

The structure of the poem plays with the chronology of events, meaning that the reader is often left with a jumble of both lived and recounted events. The action of Book IV begins with Satan’s observations of Eden, but transitions to the creatures that he observes. Here, Milton details the movements of Adam and Eve through the garden, showing their wholesome innocence. As the pair navigates Paradise, Eve begins to recount her creation story to her spouse. This is a significant departure from the biblical source material, and this play with the chronology of events has the effect of prioritizing Eve, making her the first human in the poem to recount her creation.

By narrating her own creation story, Eve has the opportunity to show her private, inner feelings. However, Milton avoids indulging in Eve’s inner monologue. Eve shows her innocent and dependent epistemology instead. She begins her narrative:

That day I oft remember, when from sleep
I first awaked, and found myself reposed
Under a shade on flow’rs, much wondring where
And what I was, whence thither brought, and how. (IV, 449-452).

Within this narration, what Eve offers is not a revelatory exploration of her emotions, or into any sort of private inner life. Instead, Eve provides a basic recounting of events. She states that she remembers her first awakening, but what she draws her attention to is not an internal monologue or the philosophical questions of her creation, but rather the mechanical and observable aspects
of the event. She recalls finding herself “reposed / Under a shade” and that she is resting “on flow’rs.” Though she asks “what I was, whence thither brought, and how,” Eve does not take any immediate action to seek out the answers to those questions. Instead, she continues to observe the natural setting surrounding her, noting the “murmuring sound / Of waters issued from a cave and spread / Into a liquid plain” and admiring the “shape within the wat’ry gleam” that appears to be “Bending to look on me [her]” (IV, 454-461). Instead of asking herself about the nature of that “wat’ry gleam,” Eve contents herself with taking in the image; departing and returning to the water’s edge catch a glimpse of that other creature. Though questions are a part of Eve’s account here, they take neither her full energy, nor her full attention. The fact that she lacks understanding does not seem to bother Eve, and she does not seek to find answers to the questions that she raises.

In her unmotivated approach to her lack of knowledge, Eve appears to exhibit something more akin to “wonder” than to true “curiosity.” As Barbara Benedict explains, wonder, “like awe, reveres the novelty it encounters” (Benedict, 5). Wonder, then, stands in contrast to “curiosity,” a loaded term that Benedict defines as “the mark of a threatening ambition.” Though the difference between wonder and curiosity might seem trivial, it is clear that these two approaches to novel information carry significantly different moral implications. In this usage, “curiosity is seeing your way out of your place. It is looking beyond” (Benedict, 2). Given these two terms, it is clear that wonder is associated more with appreciation and awe, while curiosity is tainted by implications of aggrandizement and the accumulation of power. Because Benedict argues that curiosity has the ability to “threaten the status quo,” it is important to tease out Eve’s intent here (Benedict 5). Benedict argues that Milton’s acknowledgement of cultural anxieties over the changing power dynamic between wonder and curiosity has interesting implications for
Eve and for *Paradise Lost*. Here, at the outset of the epic, some of the only instruction given to Adam and Eve is to not threaten the status quo, thereby enabling them to avoid death and reside in Eden forever. Thus, Eve’s wonder in Book IV is a justified epistemology. She is not pushing for more answers, or challenging the way that her world is constructed. Instead, she is acknowledging gaps in her knowledge while still expressing reverence for God’s creation. While Benedict notes the difference in the moral implications between wondrous and curious creatures, I also suggest that wondering as seen here is also associated more with passivity than with active agency. Beings that “wonder” accept new information with little argument or disagreement. Creatures who seek knowledge begin to move toward “curiosity.” Eve continues to maintain a status quo in this remembered sequence, taking on a passive role in building knowledge as she absorbs the information presented to her. As a result of this passivity, she does not reach a deeper understanding of her ontology within Eden, or her subjective position in relation to Adam. Instead, Milton presents an Eve who is content to accept her position, choosing to wonder at her waking instead of approaching her lack of knowledge with true curiosity.

By describing her in this wondrous subject position, the narrator of the poem prevents Eve from indulging her inner thoughts to the reader. As I have previously observed, Eve’s narration of her creation story might prompt Milton to present a deeper exploration of her emotions or internal monologue; however, Eve maintains her somewhat rigid narrative structure. Instead of delving into private thoughts, she doesn’t deviate from a version of the tale that could have been observed by an onlooker. Though she does describe herself at “much wond’ring where / And what I was, whence thither brought, and how,” these are the only aspects of her inner life that Milton furnishes (IV, 451-452). Thus, even as Eve narrates her creation story, her telling lacks the aspects of soliloquy that might otherwise be present. This is an important absence,
particularly because of the common usage of the form. Not only does soliloquy allow the reader into the private workings of a character, it is also a way to “reveal a character’s true mental processes and deepest motives,” (Robertson, 62). Though the form is a staple of dramatic literature, Milton deploys soliloquies at various points throughout the poem, and Satan, Adam, and Eve all deliver them. Because of Eve’s lack of soliloquy in this moment, any windows into those revelatory character traits or mental processes are kept firmly closed.

This lack of insight into her inner life, in addition to Eve’s wondrous nature, compounds her sense of innocence and dependence upon other beings. As Robertson details, soliloquy provides access to the inner cogs of a character, but it also serves as a way for characters to define or create a self.¹ If we take this argument to be true, Eve’s lack of soliloquy here is all the more striking. Because she does not partake in the practice, she is more or less abdicating her ability to define herself. Instead of outlining a personal manifesto, Eve is perfectly happy to absorb information as it is presented to her. By not choosing, or by not knowing how to choose, to define herself, Eve must give her definition of self over to another being. She must depend on either Adam or God to explain to her who and what she is, and at this point in the narrative, that is the only definition that Eve’s character receives. In this way, Adam’s companion seems less like a true “help meet” and more like an empty vessel, waiting for him to fill her with his perceptions of her. Hence, Eve’s status as being created for Adam also inflects her subordinate position. As Mary Nyquist argues, Eve in her first appearance is less a whole creature, and more a representation of God’s contract with Adam. Instead of creating her own subjectivity, Nyquist suggests that “Eve’s status as a divinely bestowed gift is exploited polemically […] by Milton”

¹ Robertson contends that this ability to create a self works in conjunction with Satan and his creation of a new, fully evil self. However, because both Adam and Eve deliver soliloquies later in the text, it is also an important marker of self-definition for humanity as well.
Because of this exploitation, Eve’s initial characterizations of “completeness and superiority is made to seem an illusion” as she actually an empty vessel created to show how the “‘Heav’nly Maker’ has done what he promised, that is make a fit help” for Adam (Nyquist, 118). The exclusion of Eve’s inner soliloquy compounds her position of being created not for herself, but for Adam. Because of what Nyquist describes as exploitation of her secondary position, Eve initially lacks any self-definition. This absence of self-definition is reinforced by Eve’s sparse to non-existent soliloquy, a trait that Robertson champions as a necessity. In accepting this outside assignation of being, Eve takes on a rather secondary position, choosing not to define herself, and instead allowing God and later Adam to define her.

This passivity also informs Eve’s epistemology at this point in the poem. Instead of asking her own questions or seeking to answer the questions that she does raise, Eve is entirely dependent upon other beings for new information. Though she contemplates her reflection, it isn’t until God’s “voice thus warns” her that “what there thou seest fair creature is thyself, / With thee it came and goes,” and Eve is able to recognize her reflection as a representation of herself (IV, 467-469). This exchange highlights how dependent Eve is upon another being for information. Had God not intervened to explain the mysterious creature in the water as being her own reflection, she would have continued to consider the creature as another individual. In a nod to Narcissus, Eve perhaps would have fallen in love with the “fair, winning soft” and “amiably mild” apparition of herself. As shown here, in this earliest stage of Eve’s development, it is clear that she cannot process new information, and that she is not yet able to draw conclusions from new images or new stimulation. By showcasing this interaction, Milton documents Eve’s early dependence upon others to interpret novel information for her.
Though Eve initially receives information directly from God, his divine voice isn’t her only source of information. In this early stage in her epistemology, Eve also poses her questions to Adam when she has reached the limit of her knowledge. While Milton shows Adam and Eve moving peacefully through the Garden of Eden throughout the day, at the advent of her first evening, Eve is clearly troubled. When confronted with the cosmos, Eve is puzzled by the nature of the stars. Given her limited knowledge, Eve wonders at the celestial bodies. This wonder compounds the innocence and dependence that I have previously described. This is not to say that Eve is without powers of observation. She is portrayed as a sensory being, absorbing the various visual, auditory, and tactile stimuli that come with navigating Eden. She can observe when the sun shines, and can recognize that the daylight is provided to her and Adam as a way to complete their work. However, Eve’s observational and reasoning skills can push her only so far into the realm of unknown information. Though Eve can observe new information, she is unable to build upon those observations, or to imagine an outlet for that information that goes beyond what she has observed. This is particularly evident when Eve observes the evening stars for the first time. With no recourse or methodology for finding a way to synthesize new information, Eve must turn to Adam for more information about the stars. She asks, “But wherefore all night long shine these, for whom / This glorious sight, when sleep hath shut all eyes?” (IV, 657). Eve takes the care to note her own observations, that “sleep hath shut all eyes” at night, and in her observable experience, this is true (IV, 657). Thus, it is clear that while Eve can make observations about her surroundings, she has trouble combining what she knows with new or unfamiliar information. Because of this, the knowledge of why the stars shine at night remains outside of Eve’s reach. Further, since Eve will be asleep at night, there is no experiential way for her to attain the information that she seeks.
Because of these compounding factors, Eve must depend on Adam to tell her more about the stars and their role. It is also important to note that Adam answers her question immediately. Adam’s privileged access to knowledge and information is one of the main differentiators between the two characters, and something that I will discuss at length later. In this instance, he informs his mate that the stars shine all night for the creatures “singing [to] their great Creator” in praise, and need the light of the stars to do so (IV, 684). While confirming the necessary trust that must exist in such a relationship – Eve is here trusting Adam to tell her the truth – Milton also suggests that there is a way to find the answers to questions that are beyond our observational power, but that to do so requires a relationship with another being. By posing her question to Adam, Eve seems to confirm her dependence upon him for the accumulation of digestible information. By depending on Adam so heavily, Eve signals her own inabilities, while also hinting towards the limit of her knowledge.

By displaying Eve as creature mostly dependent on another being for information, Milton broaches the subject of the limits of knowledge. In this early part of the epic, Eve’s epistemology is defined by these limitations, and it is important to explore the moral implications associated with the boundaries of what Eve knows. Before Eve begins to ask about the stars at night, she tells Adam, “My author and disposer, what thou bidd’st / Unargued I obey; so God ordains, / God is thy Law, thou mine: To know no more / Is Woman’s happiest knowledge and her praise” (IV, 634-637). Here, Eve acknowledges that she should be pleased with the law that Adam sets down for her. By claiming that knowing “no more” than what her spouse “bidd’st” leads to her “happiest knowledge and her praise,” Eve also suggests that there is something unhappy, and non-praiseworthy about knowing more than her partner bids her to (IV, 634, 637). This reinforcement of the value of “wonder” also introduces the idea that she should maintain a
limited knowledge set. Eve suggests that she can best navigate her Pre-Fall world by maintaining an innocent or un-knowledgeable mindset. The division between what leads to “happiest knowledge and her praise” and its unhappy alternative is a boundary or limitation of knowledge. In this way, Eve backs away from “seeing [her] way out of [her] place” and instead directs the reader toward the idea that her limited place should make her happy (Benedict, 2). Remember the differentiating traits between wonder and curiosity according to Benedict; wonder remains in its place, while curiosity has the ability to challenge the status quo. In hedging her question within acknowledgements of her own limitations, Eve should be interpreted as wondrous as opposed to being truly curious in Benedict’s terms.

Even as Eve suggests an innocent, wondering nature, there are still significant moments that foreshadow her eventual transition toward curiosity. Eve denotes this sense of boundary before tentatively crossing it by asking Adam about the stars. This acknowledgement of the limitation imposed, and Eve’s desire to move past it, suggests that though Eve could not obtain the information herself, she still wants to gain that knowledge. In this way, even though Eve does not disregard her limitations, it is clear that she is beginning to “look beyond” them (Benedict, 2). In this way, Eve foreshadows her later curiosity before she becomes curious. By returning to Benedict’s definitions between wonder and curiosity, we can see how Eve toes the line between wonder, which is based in reverence, and curiosity, which is grounded in active knowledge seeking. While the end result, gaining new information, is shared across both terms, Benedict argues that the intention, reverence or seeking, has significant moral ramifications. In this early state, Eve puts herself in a liminal space between wonder and curiosity. The questions that she asks create and then gingerly test the boundaries of knowledge, and this is one of the markers of
Eve’s epistemology at this point in the epic. Her tentative gestures toward curiosity are a trait that Satan will later exploit as he tempts the first woman.

Satan later uses Eve’s curiosity against her, which might imply that curiosity is wholly associated with sin. However, it is important to note the historical context surrounding the morality of curiosity, which was in flux due to the rise empiricism. Given Eve’s early vacillation between wonder and curiosity, the moral implication here is complex, and worth teasing out. Especially given the broader cultural uncertainty about knowledge seeking that Neil Kenny discusses, it is clear that the moral coding within a term such as “curiosity” was consistently shifting, particularly in a literary sense. Not only does Eve’s proclivity to curiosity shift over the course of this section of the poem, but the moral consequences of the term were also in flux. Studies into the term in early modern France and Germany provide a useful foil for similar linguistic and moral slippage occurring in England. Neil Kenny explains how defining the term was the source of great controversy. Historically speaking, curiosity was a space where “basic anxieties about knowledge and behavior were thrashed out.” As such, Milton’s epic records his own attempt to “shape” his own moral inflection and definition of the term. At the time, there were many similar attempts to record “clearly and dogmatically” the definition and morality of curiosity. And yet, because of the variety of definitions, the “shapes of curiosity came and went,” and the definitions “were constantly created and undone” (Kenny, 2). Thus, it is important to note Milton’s definition and inflection of curiosity, particularly as it shifts throughout the text. In this early iteration, Milton’s foreshadowing of Eve’s fall makes the event seem inevitable. This sense of foreboding can inflect Eve’s curiosity with moral judgment, as though Milton is condemning curiosity. And yet, by describing her own experience in wondrous terms, and by acknowledging her limits, Milton emphasizes Eve’s innocence at this point in the text. I would
argue that, the moral judgment that Milton weaves into his definition and inflections upon the term are more complex than previously supposed. I will continue to argue for a more nuanced interpretation of Milton’s moral inflection of curiosity, suggesting that though it brings about the Fall, it also helps Adam and Eve to eventually find redemption. The changing role of curiosity is an important marker to continue to trace, particularly as Eve continues to develop throughout the epic.

Adam

Much as with Eve, the poem’s first focus upon Adam portrays him as an innocent being, passively accepting the knowledge that is given to him. While early on Eve shows a proclivity to wonder and curiosity, Adam however, inhabits a more puzzling epistemological space. As Adam’s creation story opens, God gives him a full knowledge of the “nature of things.” However, this supposedly complete data set lacks the fundamental understanding of his companion Eve, a flaw with its own long-reaching repercussions. This unique position, caught between knowing and unknowing necessitates Adam’s asking questions. However, unlike Eve, Adam’s questions are designed to produce a confirmation of what he knows as opposed to gaining entirely new knowledge. Because of Adam asks mostly affirming questions, it is difficult to characterize him as a truly “curious” creature, as he does not seem to gain anything new in this early part of the epic. Even more so than Eve, Adam appears to be caught at an intersection between knowing all, and having limited knowledge. In this section of the text, Adam’s observations and questions are inflected with a deep reverence for God. This reverence, in conjunction with the sense of limitation that pervades his questions places Adam in a similar wondrous category as Eve, while also differentiating his position from hers. Thus, this place of
tension, where Adam knows the workings of his world while also acknowledging a reverent limit to his knowledge fits into Benedict’s definition of “wonder.” Though Adam wonders, his expanded knowledge base and his privileged relationship with God suggest that his sense of wonder stems from a place of veneration, even more so than Eve’s epistemology.

Because of the achronology of the text, the first instance where Milton describes the extent and limits of Adam’s knowledge occurs as Adam is recounting his creation. Though it is clear that Adam is gifted with instinctual knowledge, he must also explore himself and the world around him in order to fully comprehend his place. Adam expresses his God-given knowledge through his “instinctive motions,” such as his “springing up” after his creation (VIII, 259). However, he must also “peruse” himself, and he describes how he “limb by limb / Surveyed, and sometimes went and sometimes ran,” testing out the powers and limitations of his physical body (VIII, 267-268). Outside of his physical movements, Adam is similarly unable to find answers to, or even consider, more philosophical questions. This combination of instinct and innocence is similar to Eve’s, and also suggests a similar simplicity of comprehension. Though he seems unaware of “who I was or where, or from what cause,” Adam is still aware of “some great Maker” who is responsible for his creation (VIII, 270, 278).

In other words, Adam reveals a shared, wondering epistemology with Eve while also accessing a more instinctual type of information. God gives him a more complete understanding of what Eden is, and how he is to behave within the garden. Even with his privileged knowledge, Adam is filled with the same sort of wonder that characterizes the early descriptions of Eve.² Although both display reverence, Adam’s is depicted more fervently than Eve’s. He is more interested in maintaining the status quo that is placed before him than he is in challenging it, and

² This recalls Benedict’s argument separating wonder from curiosity. Of particular interest here is Adam’s reverent nature, which here aligns him with her definition of wonder.
Adam’s admiration for a divine maker is made clear. This section of the poem is particularly focused on Adam’s immediate recognition of his maker, and his instinctive need to praise said maker. Similarly, both Adam and Eve share a sense of innocence, Adam’s most primal, elemental state is one that seems to lack Eve’s proclivity for learning new things. I attribute this difference to Adam’s ability to lean on the knowledge that God gave to him. Because of this gift from God, Adam’s position differs from Eve’s in terms of how each relates directly to God. Nyquist’s argument suggests that Adam’s closeness to God, and his access to instinctual knowledge represents the “contractual and masculinist” institution that God bequeaths Adam (Nyquist, 114). This argument provides compelling insight into the motivations behind Adam’s closeness with God, which in turn, provides vital context around his decision-making. Because Adam is given the necessary context to negotiate pre-Lapsarian Eden, he has no reason to question what he knows or his relationship with God. This shared sense of patriarchal familiarity prevents Adam from viewing God as an omniscient yet mysterious voice. Instead, because of this closeness, Adam actively seeks a relationship with his maker. This stands in contrast to Eve’s experience, where the divine voice isn’t immediately recognized as her creator’s.

Though Adam appears to share a bond with God that Eve does not by virtue of his unique grasp of instinctual knowledge and his similar gendered positionality, his epistemology is still more similar to Eve’s, and is equally as limited. He also shares a type of “hedged epistemology” with Eve where he creates limitations and then cautiously transgresses them. This is especially apparent as he (much like Eve) seeks affirmation about his interpretation of the cosmos. As he approaches the limit of his knowledge, Adam asks Raphael to divulge the secrets of the cosmos, such as why the stars should revolve around the earth. In doing so, he shares Eve’s cautious and ingratiating question style. This hesitant approach to new knowledge is a marker of Adam’s pre-
Fall epistemology. I suggest that Adam experiences a similar relationship to knowledge-building as Eve. Before the Fall, Adam must rely on an outside being for new information. This same methodology that Eve employs, wherein she outlines a limit before asking a question, holds true in Adam’s exchange with Raphael. Adam takes on this behavior in his own quest for knowledge of gravity and planetary motion. Much like Eve, the passivity of his question follows an acknowledgement of his observational limits. While referring to Raphael as a “divine historian,” Adam proceeds to set the boundaries of his knowledge of natural science. He notes:

Who thus largely hast allayed
The thirst I had of knowledge, and vouchsafed
This friendly condescension to relate
Things else by me unsearchable, now hear,
With wonder, but delight, and as is due,
With glory attributed to the high
Creator; something yet of doubt remains,
Which only thy solution can resolve (VIII, 6-13).

Here, Adam notes that Raphael has largely “allayed” his questions, many of which he admits were “unsearchable,” previously. However, thanks to the actions of the angel, Adam has heard the answers “With wonder, but delight, and as is due, / With glory attributed to the high / Creator” (VIII, 10-11). This construction provides enough reverence that Adam appears to retreat from curiosity back to wonder. In this instance, Adam’s question is obscured by his gratitude. In the midst of thanking Raphael for answering questions that would have been
otherwise out of his reach, Adam hints that there is one final doubt that requires the angel’s knowledge to answer. By introducing his question regarding the cosmos in such a way, Adam mirrors Eve’s acknowledgement of the limits of her observational skill while also seeking to move beyond this limited perception. Adam confirms that through relation with another being, the limit can be evaded. Here, it appears that Adam is likewise beginning to tip-toe toward a more curious state of “looking beyond” his current station, while also trying to maintain his position. While Eve is often vilified for her steps into curiosity, it is clear that Adam participates in a similar boundary pushing, hesitant though it may be.

This is an important moment of moral judgment, as Adam is swiftly rebuked. Raphael’s response to Adam suggests that such boundary pushing carries a moral connotation that is similar to sin. The angel tells Adam that he “blames thee not” to “ask or search” for the answers to his questions, while also maintaining that it “imports not” to “divulge / His secrets to be scanned by them who ought / Rather admire” (VIII, 66-75). Though Raphael eventually gives up these same secrets, here he cautions Adam against overstepping his bounds. The angel recommends that Adam should “rather admire” the motions of the universe instead of fully “scanning” and understand God’s machinations. This rebuke provides an interesting place from which to analyze the connotation of curiosity here. Just by approaching curiosity, Adam receives a semi-divine admonishment. This appears to be an instance where Milton condemns curiosity, as Adam’s questions are met with negative feedback. In keeping with Kenny’s arguments surrounding the historical importance of the fluid definition of curiosity, this recorded rebuke seems to be Milton’s effort to pin down his own definition of the term. Kenny records a shift in the moral

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3 Returning to Kenny’s argument allows for further analysis into the moral code that Milton is here placing on Adam’s curiosity. Because the definition and moral standing of curiosity were fluid, this is a location where Milton seems to embed his own judgments on the matter.
perception of the term, arguing that during the sixteenth century, curiosity was most often associated with vice, or with sin. However, the term was transforming into a “healthy passion,” and the moral implication of curiosity began to shift toward curiosity becoming a positive trait (Kenny, 4). Though Kenny’s arguments surrounding curiosity collections extend beyond the scope of this project, the cultural shift that began promoting curiosity provides an important backdrop for Milton’s epic. In such a context, Milton’s use of the term here might seem to condemn curiosity as something akin to sin, moving the term away from a healthy virtue, and back toward a vice. I will argue that Milton’s project here is a bit more complex.

The context of this moment is important. In Adam’s current setting, within a fixed world, it appears that curiosity is considered to be morally reprehensible. This seems to contrast Adam’s earlier response to Eve’s hesitant questions. In the first case, Adam was answering Eve, and the knowledge gained was contained to humans. However, in the second case, Adam was asking a question of Raphael, an angel. These two responses to questioning showcases the way in which some questions can be readily answered, while others earn a strict rebuke. Thus, though the boundaries of knowledge can be expanded beyond some perception, Milton suggests that there is a limit to just how far this knowledge can be pushed. In his reply, Raphael even gently reminds Adam that he already has the answer to his question, saying, “thou remember’st, for thou heard’st” (VII, 560). This kind of dependence upon another being for information presents Adam as a seemingly empty vessel. Though he is imbued with information from his first waking, he still cannot synthesize new information with what he already knows without an outside influence. Much like Eve, he must use a hierarchy and other beings in order to confirm what he already knows.
However, this epistemology is temporally limited, and I will argue that this negative judgment upon curiosity is one that is temporally bounded as well. Curiosity is negative only in a static world where the status quo must be maintained. Adam is the figure with the most vested interest in maintaining the status quo, and dedication to maintaining the static nature of life in Paradise is exemplified in his close relationship to God. Adam’s close relationship with God as well as its implications for his epistemology appears when he is narrating his own story of creation. Within his account, Adam describes how “from among the trees appeared [His] Presence divine” (VIII, 313-314). God here appears to Adam in his divine form, and Adam is able to appreciate his creator, immediately “rejoicing” in his presence (VIII, 314). While God is in Adam’s company, the two figures discuss much of the Paradise that God give to Adam to “till and keep,” including all of the “knowledge God endued [to Adam’s] sudden apprehension” (VIII, 319, 353-354). Throughout the exchanges described in this passage, Milton develops an affectionate bond between God and Adam. The relationship builds such that even when Adam is unhappy with one aspect of his setting, he is comfortable asking God to alter his circumstances. When describing his current state, Adam asks, “what harmony or true delight” may be found in his current, solitary state (VIII, 384). Though this question might have provoked God’s ire, he instead rewards Adam. Milton describes how the “Almighty answered, not displeased” (VIII, 398). In fact, not only is God not displeased with Adam, he “was pleased / And find thee knowing not of beasts alone, / Which thou hast rightly named, but of thyself” (VIII, 437-439). This exchange suggests that even when Adam disagrees with the order of his world as it exists, God meets him not only with humor, but with agreement. This suggests that there is more than a contractual or hierarchical bond between the two figures, and that there is even an element of
play. God seems to test Adam’s knowledge of himself, even as He knows that Adam will feel incomplete. Instead of creating Eve immediately, God tests Adam good-naturedly, providing an easy assessment that allows Adam to excel easily, and to earn praise. The positive connotations here provide an important marker between Adam and Eve. Adam has no motivation to disrupt the relationship that he has either in Eden, or with God. Eve on the other hand, isn’t presented with the same positive relationship, or Milton doesn’t describe her relationship with God in the same detail. Because this relationship differs here, in the early stages of Adam and Eve’s creation, it will become another important distinction between the two as each continues to develop. The relationship displayed here, showing the closeness between Adam and God, stands in stark contrast to the relationship between God and humanity post-Fall.

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4 However, the contractual nature of this relationship is an important marker of difference, one that further separates Adam from Eve. While the implications of this relationship effects Eve’s subjective position, making her secondary, the effect on Adam’s relationship is less complex. See Mary Nyquist’s *Genesis of Gendered Subjectivity* for more on this topic.
Chapter II: Temptation Epistemology and Foreshadowing

As *Paradise Lost* progresses, the impossibility of stasis within the Garden of Eden becomes clear. This is particularly prescient for readers familiar with the source text, for whom Eve’s future actions are not a surprise. As Milton approaches the inevitable Fall, it is important to note how both Adam and Eve seem to be unknowingly preparing for their fate. In fact, Milton shows how the Fall is more than a discrete event, and both Eve and Adam begin to shift their epistemologies just before each commits Original Sin. Though this dramatic narrative shift has been the focus of past scholarship, I will here attend to the way that Milton presents the Fall as a development rather than as a clean break.

In an argument that elucidates the broader context of the Fall and its role in the cultivation of soliloquy and the defined self, David Robertson summarizes earlier scholarship by J. B. Broadbent, who suggests that “the characters of *Paradise Lost* do not soliloquize until they have fallen” (Robertson, 59). Though Robertson shies away from answering the question of “when and how exactly the Fall takes place in *Paradise Lost,*” I think that this question denotes a distinction previously taken for granted (Robertson, 60). In Robertson’s and Broadbent’s arguments, as well as in influential readings by Stanley Fish and Regina Schwartz, there is a before and an after in relation to the Fall. In these readings, a pre/post-Lapsarian construction fixes the Fall as a discrete event. Though there is of course a moment in which each character actually consumes the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, I will suggest that there is an intermediary epistemological stage that bridges the gap between pre and post-Fall. In this way, the moments before each character partakes foreshadow the ways that the couple will have to change in order to navigate their world Post-Fall. Milton’s foreshadowing, which is seen in the development of the inner dialogue and self questioning that Robertson discusses, occurs conspicuously before
Eve or Adam partake in the fruit of knowledge. Instead, this development, which pushes each toward a more complex, and more self-defined identity, happens in the moment of temptation, but before the Fall. While curiosity and its role within temptation might become a target for an easy moralization, I contend that Milton argues for a more complex attitude toward the term “curiosity” and its role in knowledge acquisition. Because Eve and Adam are both tempted with access to expanding information, it becomes clear that their static epistemologies can no longer remain the same. This means that their simple, dependent, wondrous forms of knowledge building must be replaced with something else that these figures haven’t experienced before. Both Adam and Eve’s “Temptation epistemology” begins their transition and development toward a more complex epistemology that requires full agency to produce.

Eve’s Temptation by the Serpent

Though Eve’s epistemology does not fully change until after she partakes in the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, Milton inflects her interactions with the disguised Satan that foreshadows of her eventual downfall. One of the key elements of this interaction occurs just after Satan addresses Eve for the first time. After noticing that a serpent speaks out loud to her, Eve turns, and Milton describes how she “Not unamazed thus in answer spake” (IX, 552). Eve calls out a question, wondering, “What may this mean,” before she continues on to marvel at the “Language of man pronounced / By tongue of brute and human sense expressed?” (IX, 553-554). Eve’s wonder at the speaking snake and how he has learned both human speech and “sense” is in the same category as the other questions that she has asked before. She seems to be asking a

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5 Recall Robertson’s argument here. Though a typically dramatic form, Milton deploys the soliloquy as a way as a method of self-creation. This self-generative quality is new to both Adam and Eve at this point in the epic.
mechanical question, wondering physically how it came to be that the snake discovered the ability to manipulate words, and how he has come to mimic human speech and praise patterns. These types of questions might be precluded from the type of self-defining questions that Robertson points to as being indicative of true soliloquy.

However, Eve begins her exclamation not by questioning the mechanics of how the snake came to speak to her, but rather with the short “What may this mean?” Though it is unclear whom Eve addresses here, it is plausible that she is asking this question of herself. This shift here is an important one, as before this moment Eve has typically addressed all of her questions not to herself, but to Adam. By asking herself “what may this mean,” Eve hints that she might be able to make sense of the speaking snake on her own, without input from a hierarchically superior being. While this shift may seem small, it has significant implications. Eve has begun to move toward independence here, and by posing this most surprising question to herself, she signals that her unique epistemology is sufficient to work out the puzzle of the snake’s speech unaided. Her depth of curiosity distances her from Adam, the figure that she had previously turned to for understanding. This development suggests that Eve continues to grow, and that she occupies a new epistemic space in comparison her starting point from the early parts of the poem. In taking on this tougher question, Eve also reveals more of herself to the reader, taking on more traits of soliloquy than she has before. This shift helps her to begin the first steps of creating a distinct self.

While Eve’s self-query can be seen as her initial step toward independence, it is, of course, also representative of the way in which she has isolated herself. In her solitary state, Eve becomes an easier target for Satan’s manipulation, as Adam feared she would. This instance where Eve is isolated reveals her desire to know more beyond how the world works, and she
seems to seek the deeper intent behind creation. As Eve ventures closer to temptation, Milton accentuates this desire to know more about the physical realm of Earth and the realm of gods beyond. Her reverence for her creator, something implied in her pre-Fall epistemology, is lost in her rush to attain new knowledge, moving her from wonder toward curiosity. This change is as outwardly noticeable as it is surprising for the reader. By giving way to her more curious desires, Eve falls to the serpent’s most tempting words. It is not in comparing Eve to a goddess, but rather in promising a depth of knowledge that she has previously been unable to attain that Satan convinces Eve to sin. Satan claims that even though Eve thinks that she has “eyes that seem so clear” they are in fact “yet but dim” (IX, 706-707). It is only through partaking of the forbidden fruit that they “shall perfectly be then / Opened and cleared, and ye shall be as gods, / Knowing both good and evil as they know” (IX, 707-709). Though Satan is lying to Eve in order to inspire her appetite for the fruit, the promise of a limitless knowledge is particularly appealing, especially given Eve’s awareness about the rigid limits of what she can know. Even by acknowledging that she is more inclined to curiosity, Eve makes it clear that she is already in transition toward becoming a more experienced being even before she concedes to Satan’s efforts.

As Eve teeters on the edge of temptation, Milton inflects her decision with continued self-questioning. In this part of the poem, Eve makes many demands, and asks many questions. Much as in her initial gasp of wonder at hearing the serpent’s speech, the addressee of her questions remains ambiguous. While she might be speaking to the serpent, there is no indication that the serpent attempts to respond, or that Eve expects him to do so. Here, it is more likely that Eve poses questions addressed to herself. Because of the connection between independence and

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6 I will return to Satan and the construction of his lies in a later section.
temptation, Milton implies that Eve’s solitary search for knowledge above her station leads directly to her fall, and this implication is reflected in the questions that she asks. As Eve is slowly giving into the serpent’s promises, she continues to ask a litany of questions: “In plainthen, what forbids he but to know, / Forbids us good, forbids us to be wise;” “How dies the serpent;” “For us alone / Was death invented? Or to us denied / This intellectual food, for beasts reserved;” “What fear I then, rather what know to fear / Under this ignorance of good and evil, / Of God or death, of law or penalty?” (IX, 757-775). With one final and seemingly rhetorical question, “What hinders then to reach, and feed at once both body and mind,” Eve plucks the fruit from the tree of knowledge (IX, 777-778). With this string of questions, Eve is clearly developing a more complex epistemology. Yet, even as Eve gains an inner monologue and develops the ability to question her surroundings, it is not enough to protect her from beguilement.

The knowledge necessary to resist temptation is outside of Eve’s grasp when she finally succumbs to temptation. However, because Eve has just moved into a new epistemological space, she is not quite ready to connect what she learns with what she already knows. Regina Schwartz makes an important note about memory and epistemology, suggesting that fusing memory with new information is a vital aspect of assessing and potentially placing a check upon novel information. Schwartz’ argument suggests that without evaluating new information, its credibility is impossible to discern. In this sequence, Eve displays a nearly amnesiac relationship with what should be imbedded in her memory. This shows Eve’s inability to appropriately address the new information that she encounters. Satan becomes a “bad scientist” figure, akin to
a huckster pedaling well-ordered lies, but Eve is unable to tell if his lies are credible or not. Schwartz maintains that Eve omits important pieces of information from memory, or that her lack of memory prevents her from recognizing the consequences of her actions. Though Eve should know that death is what hinders her from eating the forbidden fruit, she cannot bring this fact to mind. I find this notion to be more poignant than Schwartz assumes. Instead of Eve suffering from forgetfulness, I suggest that at this point in the narrative, she hasn’t yet developed the faculties to bring together her memories with new information. Because she hasn’t become truly curious, she also isn’t yet fully able to learn. Rather than a moment of forgetting, I suggest that Eve is tempted before she could ever truly resist temptation. Though her self-questioning shows that she is continuing to develop a more complex epistemology, her Fall signals that her methodology is not yet complete. Thus, Satan is so tempting because Eve does not have the proper tools to see his lies for what they are, and as a result, she falls. By using Satan’s temptation as a way to inflect the way that Eve asks questions of herself, Milton hints at the transformation that Eve brings about. In this interpretation, the Fall becomes an unfortunately timed event in Eve’s development. Instead of occurring when she is most likely to resist Satan, he approaches her at her weakest. Caught in the strange space between wonder and curiosity, in this moment Eve is perhaps her most curious. Even with such curiosity, Eve is inexperienced and unable to tell truth from fiction. As we will see, Adam shares this same sense of unpreparedness with his spouse, and it is a similar combination of circumstances and ongoing epistemic development that convinces him to fall as well.

The difference between experiential and experimental data is the keystone of Karen Edwards’ argument, which suggests that Satan beguiles Eve with “falsified” information. Here, he has faked his experience in eating from the Tree of Knowledge, presenting Eve with results from an experiment that he hasn’t performed.
Adam’s Temptation by Eve

The parallels between Adam and Eve’s epistemological shifts are marked. Just as Eve foreshadows her own epistemological transformation as she discusses the benefits of the forbidden fruit with Satan, Adam’s questions for Eve hint at transformation even before he follows Eve’s example. Immediately after Eve reveals her sin, Adam meets her behavior with an internal question. He wants to know “How art thou lost, how on a sudden lost, / Defaced, deflow’red, and now to death devote?” (IX, 900-901). This question may suggest that he is still dependent upon Eve as an outside source for information, but by asking himself how she is suddenly lost, he is not asking about the simple mechanics of how she ate from the Tree of Knowledge. Eve has just recounted that she was tempted by the serpent, and ate from the forbidden tree, and Adam is well aware of the mechanics of eating. Here, Adam is asking a more philosophical question, wondering how it was that she could have been tempted, or how she could have succumbed to the serpent’s promises. This sort of philosophical wondering continues as he begins to contemplate the consequences of her actions. Adam muses,

Some cursed fraud
Of enemy hath beguiled thee, yet unknown,
And me with thee hath ruined, for with thee
Certain my resolution is to die;
How can I live without thee, how forgo
Thy sweet converse and love so dearly joined,
To live again in these wild woods forlorn? (IX, 904-910).
Much like Eve, Adam begins to ask questions that do not have concrete answers. “How can I live without thee, how forgo / Thy sweet converse and love so dearly joined,” Adam wonders of his spouse (IX, 907-910). Adam here begins to pose the types of questions that move him toward Robertson’s self-defining soliloquy. This section of the text is decidedly more psychological in nature, revealing Adam’s inner thoughts, and highlighting his development of an inner life. By posing a question to which there is no answer, Adam doesn’t gain any new details; he is instead showing a sudden increase of philosophical depth. Thus, in showcasing a new type of questioning, Milton suggests that Adam has progressed into a new type of epistemology even before he sins.

This development towards a more advanced and philosophical type of knowledge building is compounded as Adam begins to tentatively imagine a future without Eve present in it. Even as Adam considers and builds this alternative life, he reassures both himself and Eve that in reality he has no choice:

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 they state
Mine never shall be parted, bliss or woe. (IX, 910-916).

Adam decides that there isn’t a way for him to live without Eve, or to forgo her company. Rather, Adam chooses death over having to give up his life with Eve. Adam shows that he is
capable of having an inner conversation, and of imagining a potential future. Much like Eve deciding that it is “a death to imagine” dying while Adam lives with another, Adam similarly concludes that there is no true choice but to join Eve in death. Though Adam presents an alternative option, one where he will “live again in these wild woods,” to him it is not a viable option (IX, 910). This realization, that in reality, Adam “never shall be parted, bliss or woe,” from Eve, is revelatory in that it suggests that Adam is becoming less of an empty vessel dependent on another being for interpretation (IX, 916). Instead, he is able to envision consequences for himself and can make judgment-based decisions that take those consequences into account. By presenting the various options that Adam evaluates for himself, Milton exhibits a similar development into soliloquy already experienced by Eve. Here, the reader sees Adam part from God in order to side with his wife. Given Adam’s earlier privileged relationship with God, this is no easy decision to come to, and Adam reaches his decision only after discounting every other option. In this way, the reader is exposed to Adam’s inner thoughts, produced in the soliloquy form that Robertson might consider already fallen.

This development in Adam’s agency both mirrors Eve’s development and foreshadows is own Fall. Though it may seem as though Adam’s epistemology might be defined solely in terms of pre and post-Fall, his developments here suggest that instead, there is an intermediary form of epistemology that Adam must move through on his way to the Fall. In the way, Adam seems to develop from his previous innocence, to something more complex in this state. Because of this development, Adam’s fate is almost inevitable.
Chapter III: Post-Fall Epistemology

Through the first half of their story, Adam and Eve each don’t so much search for knowledge as they have knowledge presented to them. While both make observations of their surroundings, and ask other beings for more information, their approach to building knowledge is bounded. As I have previously explored, Eve and Adam’s knowledge seeking is inflected by the idea of limitation. As each tests the boundaries of knowledge and pushes against perceived limitations on what is right for them to know, the characters couch their questions through flattery. Even the narrator notes that “to know no more” than they might observe brings true happiness (IV, 637-638). However, this careful approach to and retreat from epistemological limitations is bounded temporally. After Eve partakes of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge and convinces Adam to do the same, there is no need for the characters to cautiously approach a determined limit. By eating the forbidden fruit, they have already rendered such a limit moot. Here, I will suggest that post-Fall, Eve and Adam have gained a seemingly infinite volume of knowledge, while at the same time losing a sense of connection to God’s intent. This juxtaposition of knowledge of the how but no longer an indication of the why presents itself in the emergence of seemingly rhetorical questions and the disappearance of the type of hedged questions that characterize much of the earlier text.

This stage of Adam and Eve’s epistemology is also defined by the full transition from “wonder” to “curiosity”. Both figures begin to lose touch with the sense of reverence and ease that defined their earlier epistemological states, particularly as they begin to contemplate their new lives in the fallen world. Instead, the reality of their changed living situation makes problem-solving and curiosity a necessity. Though this transition seems to move the figures
away from God initially, it is also the trait that will allow the couple to survive and eventually redeem humankind. In order to rise to this challenge, each must also take charge of becoming more self-defined. Milton represents this shift by providing longer narrative passages that delve into Adam and Eve’s rich inner lives. As a part of this growth, both Adam and Eve are also depicted as having increased agency in proposing actions that will impact the future. Both figures combine what they know with new information, creating complex analyses of consequence. This shift suggests a final epistemological state, one that enables sophisticated reasoning.

**Eve**

Throughout much of *Paradise Lost*, Eve can be considered the first or prime character, and her transfiguration from innocence into experience reinforces this characterization.8 After her beguilement by Satan, Eve no longer asks questions about how her world works, nor does she feel a need to approach limits to her knowledge cautiously. In the new fallen world, Eve’s shifted epistemology highlights her ascent toward experience. This shift can also be seen as her final turn from wonder toward true curiosity. Instead of observing her surroundings and accepting the way that things are with a sense of reverence, Eve seeks to comprehend both *how* and *why* her world is the way that it is. Eve seeks this knowledge while also contemplating her ability to change the world around her. This transition in Eve’s observations suggest that she has developed a host of new skills, such as a richer inner life, and that she has progressed into a state of being wherein she can constructively combine new information with old, and can now

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8 Mary Nyquist further explores Eve’s unique subject position as being both “prime” in terms of experience, and also secondary or subject to Adam.
imagine herself in new futures. In this part of the poem, Milton showcases all of the various ways that Eve has developed into a more rational though fallen state.

The change in Eve’s epistemology is immediately apparent after she has partaken from the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. After eating the fruit, Eve ponders how she will inform Adam of her transgression. The questions that Eve asks herself are the first marker of the significant change that has occurred:

But to Adam in what sort
Shall I appear? Shall I to him make known
As yet my change, and give him to partake
Full happiness with me, or rather not,
But keep the odds of knowledge in my power
Without copartner? So to add what wants
In female sex, the more to draw his love,
And render me more equal, and perhaps
A thing not undesirable, sometime
Superior, for inferior who is free? (IX, 816- 825).

Here, we see that Eve is still filled with questions, though their tenor and content have changed. In comparison to instances where Eve is curious about the way that the physical world works, these questions center on Eve herself, and whether she should reveal the nature of her change to Adam. Eve asks herself if she should reveal her transgression -- “Shall I to him make known”-- in order to extend an invitation to Adam to enter “full happiness,” shifting away from seeking to
understand the physical working world and moving into a moral discourse. As she ponders whether it is best to share her knowledge with Adam or to keep such information to herself, Eve is asking questions of a philosophical nature as opposed to asking questions with literal or mechanical answers. By engaging in this type of questioning, Eve transitions to a much more complex realm of knowledge building, one that suggests her own development. This is a sharp contrast with the knowledge building that she engaged in earlier in the text, which required another being to impart information to her. Whereas previous questions involved discovering more about her surroundings, Eve’s questions here require rational evaluative skills, and she is able to respond to her queries herself. In this way, Eve’s more curious pondering is a marked departure from her previous wonderings.

Once she has eaten the forbidden fruit, Eve transitions her questions to focus on her place in that world, both where she is situated and where she would like to be situated. Eve asks about how she should behave, and whether or not to bring Adam into experience with her. By entering this type of discourse, Eve has clearly gained the ability to contemplate consequences, and that she recognizes that her actions can alter those consequences. The relationship between Eve’s questions and their answers in the pre-Fall areas of the text showcased a very different relationship between Eve and consequence. In her innocent, more wondrous state, there seemed to be few if any consequences of her gaining further information. For example, when Eve questioned Adam about the motion of the stars at night, there was a definite answer to her question: they shine for nocturnal, non-human beings. Eve’s knowledge of the stars, their nightly travels, and their purpose, does not impact the phenomenon. Eve cannot change the shining of the stars at night by knowing more about them. However, here Milton suggests that Eve does have the power to change an outcome, that her knowledge is consequential. In gaining
knowledge, Eve can consider the consequences of multiple proposed actions, choosing how to act based on the future that she imagines. She wonders if it is not better to “keep the odds of knowledge in [her] power” so that she can “render [herself] more equal, and perhaps, / A thing not undesirable, sometime / Superior” to Adam (IX, 823-825). Here, it is clear that Eve considers keeping her knowledge to herself, contemplating how she might become less subordinate to Adam by using knowledge to add “to what wants / In female sex” (IX, 822) Conversely, she is also able to evaluate the effect of sharing her newfound information with Adam, bringing him into “full happiness” with her (IX, 819). Unlike Eve’s cosmology question, here her increased knowledge will have a direct effect on her relationship with Adam, and she recognizes this fact by suggesting two possible outcomes to her actions. On the one hand, she can choose to tell Adam, and they can continue into the future, she believes, in much the same way that they have already lived their lives. On the other, she can choose not to tell Adam, and she can become “more equal” to him or even gain a type of superiority over him, but the futurity of that choice is unclear.

This line of questioning is a significant departure from her previous questions because it suggests that Eve is expressing an increased awareness about her ability to make choices, their consequences, and how her future might change as a result of her choice. This type of question not only highlights Eve’s intellectual development, it also suggests a newfound sense of interiority based on the fact that she is asking these questions of herself. By contemplating the complex consequences of her actions, and by considering what she might want, Eve is engaging in a rich inner life that was previously obscured or non-existent. Eve not only asks herself questions, she provides answers and casts judgment on various outcomes that she imagines. Eve’s self-questioning and inner dialogue shows the way that her epistemology has developed as
a result of the Fall. Notably, this is apparent when Eve considers the consequences of not telling Adam about her transformation, contemplating how it is “A thing not undesirable, [to be] sometime / Superior; for inferior who is free?” (IX, 123-124). While Eve is able to evaluate the consequences of this action, she also delves into a form of soliloquy that shows her reflections on her inner thought process. Eve reveals the ways in which she contemplates her new wisdom, suggesting that it may be beneficial to keep such wisdom to herself. In fact, she suggests that she might even use this knowledge “the more to draw his love,” in reference to her spouse. She also points out to herself that gaining an equal position with Adam isn’t a negative it is “a thing not undesirable” (IX, 822-824). Presenting her interpretation before the question, Eve has already considered alternatives, and she has decided that maintaining her primacy is a good thing. In order to come to this conclusion, Eve consults only herself. This means that she must have engaged in an internal conversation before she vocalizes her question. This transition wherein Eve comes to her own conclusions, and clearly engages herself in an inner conversation is a marked shift from her previous epistemology. Eve is coming to define herself more strongly, revealing inner thoughts and feelings as her soliloquy-like discourse suggests. Not only do Eve’s questions compound this sense of interiority, the language that she uses also intensifies this effect, as observed by Catherine Gimelli Martin. She uses terms that suggest her differentiation from others and her former self, asking how she will make known, “As yet my change,” and wondering what will happen when “I shall be no more” (IX 816, 823, emphasis my own). This more defined sense of self is an important marker, and it suggests that Eve is no longer

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9 Though outside of the scope of this project, Gimelli Martin’s observations of the linguistic shift toward self containment is an important confirmation of the novelty of this sense of self-interiority. Eve’s language here is inflected with this sense of self-containment and self-creation. Adam will later be inflected with a similar sense of self.
dependent upon other beings to provide her with defining characteristics. Instead, she is able to
generate her own traits and thoughts.

As Eve continues to develop, her generative abilities only become more and more
noticeable, suggesting that Eve has gained the ability to create new information out of what she
already knows. This integration is something that has previously been impossible, as both Adam
and Eve have been dependent on other beings to perform this integration for them. By
contemplating not telling Adam about her transgression, Eve approaches the situation in a
constructive way. Here, she is able to integrate what she knows, death as a consequence of eating
from the tree of knowledge, with what she doesn’t know, how Adam will react, in order to create
a new future. In this imagined future where she is “more equal” to Adam, and “sometime
superior” to him, Eve explores the possible repercussions:

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 (IX, 825-830).

Building upon her changed epistemology whereby she introduces questions, here Eve explores
the boundaries of her new methodology by projecting a consequence into the future based on her
knowledge. Eve knows that in retribution for her eating from the Tree of Knowledge, her
punishment is death. However, when she might die, and in what manner, is still a mystery. Even
so, Eve can use the information that she does have to predict a scenario that might arise as a
result. She knows that she has eaten from the Tree, and that she will die. She also knows that Adam remains in an innocent, deathless state. By putting these two pieces of information together, Eve is quick to surmise that if she keeps knowledge to herself, Adam will continue to exist without fear of death. Thus, Eve will perish, and Adam will continue. However, because she also knows both her own origin story and Adam’s, Eve guesses that God won’t leave Adam without a partner. As Adam recounts, God tells him that He “Knew it not good for man to be alone,” and that He will provide Adam with his “likness, his fit help, his other self” (VIII, 445-450). Eve considers what to do, putting together these three pieces of information with the conclusion that after she dies, immortal Adam will be “wedded to another Eve” (IX, 827). Not only does Eve conjure this potential future, she makes her own judgment of it. Eve is so struck and so saddened by the mere thought of Adam marrying another that she calls it “A death to think” (IX, 830). Here, Eve has grown from her original, innocent epistemology. She is able to imagine future scenarios by combining what she knows with new information. Even more advanced, Eve is able to contemplate these new futures and evaluate their fitness. By including such judgments and these interludes that reveal Eve’s inner decision making, Milton suggests that wisdom has enabled Eve to create and navigate her own inner life, while also suggesting that she has transitioned into a self-encompassed being.

While these aspects of Eve’s transformation seem to recommend the benefits of knowledge, Milton is quick to follow Eve’s burgeoning independence with another trait: solitude. Just as Eve is gaining her footing as an individual, the content of her questions suggests an increasing incompatibility with her current existence in Paradise, as well as a growing rift

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10 As Mary Nyquist observes, this promise and Adam’s recounting of it provide an interesting foil for Eve’s own subjective position. In recognizing that she was created in many ways “for” Adam, Eve is perhaps rightly skeptical about her position as Adam’s only mate.
with God. Though she was promised a perfect godlike type of knowledge, it is clear that her perception is not as all encompassing as she expected. By turning to Eve’s questions in the latter books of Paradise Lost, Eve’s eyes which should “perfectly then be opened and cleared” are far from perfect. Instead of fully comprehending “good and evil” as gods know it, Eve is instead left with imperfect knowledge of why events occur or how to continue to navigate her world. It is because of this imperfection that Eve must tell Adam about her transgression, and why she needs his help to navigate their new reality.

Adam

Throughout this portion of the epic, Adam’s epistemology must change as much as Eve’s does. However, the changes to Adam’s epistemology differ significantly from the changes to Eve’s. Whereas Eve develops from a position entirely dependent on God and Adam, creating a new self in addition to developing reasoning skills, Adam is caught managing his old innate knowledge as well as the new knowledge gained from the fruit. Already possessing enough information to create a contained self, Adam has a less dramatic transformation to enact. However, because his development is different does not indicate that it is lesser. Adam’s epistemology enables him to gain a better understanding of unforeseen consequences, one of which is his recognition of the distance that has opened between him and God.

Though Adam follows Eve’s example, eating the forbidden fruit, and thereby gaining new “more perfect” knowledge, Adam’s experience with his new wisdom almost immediately reveals that the serpent’s promise was at best a half-truth.\textsuperscript{11} While Adam can better contemplate

\textsuperscript{11} This “bad science” might be an inflection against the kind of curiosity that depends not on actual, observed evidence, but on projected information. Karen Edwards notes how Satan’s claim
the future, he suggests that this ability has been bought at an exceptionally high price, and one that cannot be revoked or altered. Milton is quick to describe the way that the two immediately fall to other sins, partaking in lustful “amorous play” (IX, 1045). This sin has the effect of permanently cementing the pair’s fate, and they take “largely, of their mutual guilt the seal, / The solace of their sin” (IX, 1042-1043). By undertaking their lustful activities, Adam and Eve begin to move further and further away from their formerly perfect state, as if they can only find solace from sin by engaging in more sin. While both members of the couple recognize the growing distance between them and God, it is Adam who voices his concern and describes a seemingly unbridgeable gulf between him and his creator. This admission of culpability and loss comes at the end of a lengthy description of what knowledge has brought Adam and Eve. Adam extensively outlines the consequences of his and Eve’s actions, even those that weren’t foreseen pre-Fall:

O Eve, in evil hour though didst give ear
To that false worm of whomsoever taught
To counterfeit man’s voice, true in our fall,
False in our promised rising; since our eyes
Opened we find indeed, and find we know
Both good and evil, good lost, and evil got,
Bad fruit of knowledge, if this be to know,
Which leaves us naked thus, of honor void,
Of innocence, of faith, of purity,

To experience is in fact a lie, which provides an important distinction between a judgment of empiric knowledge and a judgment of poorly constructed “empiric knowledge”.
Our wonted ornaments now soiled and stained,
And in our faces evident the signs
Of foul concupiscence; whence evil store;
Even shame, the last of evils; of the first
Be sure then. (IX, 1067-1080).

Adam continues to show how he has developed a more advanced method of creating understanding than he could have conceived pre-Fall. While the consideration of consequences first emerges just before Adam and Eve fall, neither Adam nor Eve predicts that the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge will change their relationship with God in such a drastic way. It is only through partaking in the fruit that the pair can recognize this consequence in hindsight. Adam immediately identifies that while the serpent was “true” in predicting man’s fall, he was “False in our promised rising.” This suggests that Adam recognizes that though the serpent promised that knowledge would permit man to “rise” to the status of “goddesses” or gods, that rise is not as promised, and instead of making Man more perfect, it instead makes them less so.

Adam’s recognition of Satan’s falsehoods might be seen as a condemnation of the type of curiosity that Eve falls prey to. However, his fuller understanding of the relationship between action and consequence is only available to Adam after the fall. Keeping in mind Edwards’s argument about Satan’s falsification of data, proper reasoning skills are clearly necessary to guard against misinterpretation. Prior to this point in the poem, neither Adam nor Eve possesses those reasoning skills, and as a result both are susceptible to Satan’s lies. As Adam continues to develop a more curious epistemology, he better recognizes that Satan can predict only the Fall with any accuracy. However, by the time that Adam has gained the skill to recognize this, it is already too late, and he has already consumed the forbidden fruit. As a result of the changes
wrought by the Fall, Adam is able to note exactly what their new-found knowledge has cost them. Both Adam and Eve knew that partaking from the forbidden tree would result in knowledge of death, but Adam points out that there is more than one consequence of their actions. This recognition of his new place in the fallen world suggests that Adam has developed significantly, something that is reinforced by the emergence of an emotional monologue.

In much the same way that Eve displays her Post-Fall epistemology in the form of questions, Adam develops a similar skill here. Instead of focusing on the mechanical workings of his world, Adam becomes much more interested in how he will navigate it. After describing their current circumstances, Adam asks Eve, “How shall I behold the face / Henceforth of God or angel, erst with joy / And rapture so oft beheld?” (IX, 1081-1082). Milton has foreshadowed this type of question construction, hinting before the Fall that increased knowledge results in asking almost unanswerable questions. By asking Eve a question to which there is no answer, much less one that she could produce for him, Adam confirms his epistemological transformation. While I earlier discussed how unanswerable questions allow Milton to show how Eve has developed critical thinking skills as well as inner conversations, the same construction is mirrored here.

This change is particularly difficult for Adam however, and he turns to Robertson’s more soliloquic expression to show these internal struggles. Before the Fall, it is clear that Adam held a privileged relationship with God, and afterward it is even more clear that Adam is having a more difficult time interpreting and accepting his changed state than his counterpart. Adam knows that their relationships are forever changed. He laments that “those heav’nly shapes / Will dazzle now this earthly, with their blaze / Insufferably bright” (IX, 1082-1084). Instead of being able to welcome the physical presence of God, Adam understands that he will no longer be able to recognize their heavenly forms. Rather, their overwhelming “blaze” will be “insufferably
bright,” suggesting that for him to look upon the figures will henceforth be painfully uncomprehending. With this in mind Adam knows that he will not be able to welcome God or angels as guests, and will no longer be able to enjoy their company. After the Fall, Adam is ashamed of his and Eve’s actions, and he knows that the bond between himself and God will never again have the same close relationship that they previously enjoyed. This shame becomes especially important when we recall Adam’s dependent nature. In the early portions of the poem, Adam depends on God for much of his existence. He has previously been given access to privileged information in the form of his innate knowledge of himself and the animals in his domain, and his bond with God has produced his companion, Eve. The demise of this relationship highlights the fact that while Adam is gaining agency, he will no longer have access to his more innocent epistemology. Instead of being able to commune directly with God in order to gain new knowledge, Adam will have to employ his own faculties to come to his own conclusions. As the figure that previously enjoyed unfettered access to God, Adam finds the permanence of this development unsettling, and he laments the changes to his relationship with God.

This same estrangement is true for Adam’s praise, and prayers. While pre-Fall he had been able to directly communicate with God, Adam now must ask Michael “where shall I seek / His bright appearances, or footstep trace?” (XI, 328-329). Adam can no longer find God, nor can he find traces of God. Because of this new confusion, Adam and Eve must resort to “unskilled prayer” in order to try to bridge the rift between God and Man, something that never used to exist. Though the promise of “perfect knowledge” wooed Eve to sin, in reality gaining knowledge in one sense leads to a loss of knowledge in another. The types of questions that
Adam in particular raises suggests that even as Adam and Eve begin to make their own decisions, the uncertainty associated with their separation from God is impossible to dispel.

This uncertainty is panic-inducing for Adam. Though it produces a type of “dynamism,” in the world, for Adam it can only bring despair.\textsuperscript{12} After God’s Son hands down humanity’s punishment, Adam is inconsolable. Though he can comprehend some of the consequences of his actions, and though he has gained a richer understanding of the world, Adam laments to God that, “Inexplicable thy justice seems” (X, 754-755). Though death was to be Man’s punishment for partaking from the fruit of the tree of knowledge, the additional implications of Adam and Eve’s changed circumstances are baffling to Adam. Instead of producing feelings of deserved punishment, God’s edicts instead produce a “sense of endless woe” (X, 753-754). Though Adam eventually comes to judge God’s will as “fair,” the growing sense of displeasure that Adam feels serves to underscore his lack of understanding of God’s intentions. God and Adam’s closeness in the beginning of the text came from mutually understanding each other, so the new rift in their relationship suggests the impossibility that Adam and God will regain the closeness that they once had.

Though it is clear that Adam struggles with the changes that the Fall establishes, he has no choice but to go forward into his new realm. Though Adam laments his new fallen circumstances, he must learn to navigate this new world. After Adam’s initial panic wears off, and after he mourns his former relationship with God, Adam is able to use his more developed faculties to interact with his new world curiously. Even as Adam and Eve’s entrance into experience drives them from God and understanding His ways, it enables them to work together

\textsuperscript{12} I am here referencing Catherine Gimelli Martin’s argument from \textit{The Ruins of Allegory}, where she suggests that the fallen world allows for more change and malleability than the un-fallen world of Paradise.
to more fully consider and explore their path forward. Using this approach, Adam is able to help steer Eve and humanity back toward redemption.

**Adam and Eve Together Post-Fall**

Though Eve’s temptation and transformation move her away from God, each also shifts her toward being a more considerate being, and Adam’s subsequent transformation produces parallel effects. The Fall suggests the universal effect of the fruit while also setting Adam and Eve on more equal footing. By making the pair more evenly matched in terms of knowledge and epistemological process, the Fall allows each of them to consider consequences separately before proposing solutions together. This development is an important marker, particularly as Adam and Eve must contemplate their future. Though Adam and Eve had hitherto relied on asking questions to gain and synthesize new information, as the poem progresses post-Fall, the couple is able to propose new information without depending on questions to do so.

Both Adam and Eve are preoccupied with the nature of death, since the timing and the result of dying are still unclear to them. Knowing that she, Adam, and their offspring will have to face death, Eve combines her experiences with her knowledge in order to attempt to outsmart death. She suggests a new way of life to Adam, reminding him “childless thou art, childless remain: so Death / Shall be deceived his glut, and with us two / Be forced to satisfy his rav’rous maw” (X, 989-991). By Eve’s suggestion, if the couple refrains from reproducing then death will have to be satisfied in taking only their two lives. This proposition might contradict God’s earlier

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13 It is important to note that the inequality between Adam and Eve is a much broader topic that is somewhat outside of the scope of this project. However, Mary Nyquist writes eloquently on the subject. Here, I mean to express that the Fall causes both Adam and Eve to undergo significant epistemological change.
edict that the pair be fruitful, but it also prevents the race of Man from meeting a potentially gruesome end. Because neither Adam nor Eve has much of a conception of death, Eve imagines death to be particularly grisly, and not having children will prevent them from having to meet an assuredly horrible death as well.

This issue of what Eve imagines death to be also leads her to consider ending her own life, and she suggests that seeking death might be a way to outsmart death. She tells Adam:

But if thou judge it hard and difficult,
Conversing, looking, loving, to abstain
From love’s due rites, nuptial embraces sweet […]
Let us seek Death, or he not found, supply
With our own hands his office on ourselves (X, 992-998).

In this passage, it is clear that Eve is trying to take what she knows about their current situation in order to make a prediction about future outcomes. In addition, Eve is trying to find a plan of action that might alter the fate of mankind. Here, she suggests that if Adam and Eve remain childless, or if they seek death before death can come for them, they might be able to deprive death of his due, or “destruction with destruction to destroy.” This shows that Eve has fully transformed into a thinking, creative being. She has created or imagined an entirely new option that Adam and Eve would never have considered before. This is a marked shift in her epistemology, as this idea is self generated, and required input from nobody but herself. In comparison to her previous epistemic methodology that included tiptoeing her way into finding more information, this Eve is nearly unrecognizable.
Though Eve presents Adam with a novel way to escape the punishment of death, or to alter how they must meet this end, Adam likewise proves that he has become a rational creature as well. Instead of following her, he contradicts her interpretation. He reminds Eve that God is still all powerful, and that there is hope to be found.

The penalty pronounced, doubt not but God
Hath wislier armed his vengeful ire than so
To be forestalled; much more I fear lest death
So snatched will not exempt us from the pain
We are by doom to pay; rather such acts
Of contumacy will provoke the Highest
To make death in us live; then let us seek
Some safer resolution, which methinks
I have in view, calling to mind with heed
Part of our sentence, that thy seed shall bruise
The serpent’s head” (X, 1022-1032).

By meeting Eve’s suggestion with a rebuttal however, Adam confirms that she is not the only creature to have undergone a significant epistemological change. While he does not dismiss her interpretation outright, Adam considers her suggestion to the extreme. In doing so, he is able to imagine what she suggests, as well as add his own interpretation of the consequences of her imagined action. This response suggests that Adam listens to her new information, considers that information, and is then is able to judge whether he agrees with her interpretation. In this case, he
fears that her actions will not free them, but will instead “provoke the highest / To make death in us live” (X, 1027-1028). He instead cautions her to “seek some safer resolution,” that might allow them to triumph over death without invoking more of God’s ire (X, 1029). In fact, Adam goes on to remind Eve that their current situation may not be as bad as she expects, and that they may not need to go to creative lengths to avoid or alter their fate. “We expected / Immediate dissolution, which we thought / Was meant by death that day, when lo, to thee / Pains only in child-bearing were foretold,” Adam tells Eve (X, 1048-1051). Here, Adam reminds his spouse that even in their current state, the consequences of their actions are not as bad as had been expected, and that their punishment may not include only suffering. Though Eve is destined to experience “pains” in childbirth, she will be “soon recompensed with joy” in bringing forth the “fruit of thy womb” (X, 1051-1052). Thus, Adam reminds Eve that though there is some suffering foretold, there is also joy. This placatory tone continues as he dismisses the misery of his new role. For Adam’s own punishment, “with labor I must earn my bread,” but he asks, “what harm? Idleness had been worse” (X, 1054-1055). In this way, Adam creates a new interpretation of their punishment, pushing against Eve’s. Here, Adam, like Eve, takes what he knows and combines it with new information. However, he seems to perform his own close reading of their punishment, and he reminds Eve not to imagine worse punishment than is actually presented to them. In doing so, Adam takes what Eve provides him into consideration, before using his own skills to answer her suggestion. This key reminder is an important aspect of highlighting Adam’s changed epistemology. As Schwartz argues, Adam’s use of memory here helps him to better interpret his current situation. Adam recalls how God has acted toward Adam and Eve in the past, and he uses this “data” to influence his imaginings of the future. This is a complex expression of rational thought, and this use of memory is particular to humanity in its
fallen state. In doing so, Adam repairs the rift that had appeared between him and Eve. In addition, his suggestion to “prostrate fall / Before him [God] reverent, and there confess / Humbly our faults and pardon beg” is agreeable to both Adam and Eve, and together they take full responsibility for their part in committing the first sin (X, 1087-1089). In turn, it is this action that leads to God’s mercy, and allows Adam and Eve to begin their new lives in the Fallen world.

While Adam and Eve may initially arrive at different conclusions about their fate, by coming together and voicing these two interpretations, they are eventually able to find a solution that is agreeable to both of them. Though the Fall has precipitated dramatic changes in each of their epistemologies, these changes allow the two to cooperate. By presenting their interpretations, each is able to contemplate an imagined reality, consider the consequences, and make an informed decision about how to proceed. This new type of knowledge is imperfect, but it is enough to help Adam and Eve navigate their new world. As Diane McColley states, it is the “fullest use” of “those faculties and capacities” developed after the fall that leads to the process of regeneration (McColley, 2).
Chapter IV: Satan

Any discussion of changing epistemology or the events surrounding the Fall is inflected by Satan’s actions. While his deeper motivations and all of the ways that he pressures other figures in the text begin to exceed of the scope of this project, there are important points where Adam and Eve’s epistemologies are shaped by Satan’s decision-making. This is particularly true of Eve as she is tempted. Though there are remarkable overlaps in their epistemologies, Adam and Eve continue to develop past Satan’s influence, and that in the end, they are able to outgrow him. In this way, Satan’s stunted epistemology provides a static yardstick against which to measure Adam and Eve’s growth.

While the scholarly discussion of Satan’s discourse, poetics, and fallenness remains rich and detailed, what I propose here is a narrower analysis of whether Satan is able to exhibit true curiosity. As I have shown, Adam and Eve are able to move from innocent states of wonder and through self-questioning to finally arrive at curiosity. Satan, in comparison, is not able to fully transition to true curiosity, and instead continues a cyclical repetition where he reiterates what he already knows. My focus on cyclicity and repetition takes into account the rich discussion characterized by the works of Stanley Fish and Regina Schwartz, both of whom indicate the ways that Satan repeats himself. While it is outside of the scope of this project to parse the various ways that Satan recycles the same materials, and if those materials are generative, re-generative, or simply cyclic, this penchant for repetition is worth attending to. In particular, Schwartz’s and Fish’s focus on memory provides a methodology for analyzing the role of memory in Satan’s epistemic development. Taken together, these discussions help to identify instances where Satan’s transitions from wonder to curiosity are cut off. It is my belief that these
consistent repetitions prevent Satan from progressing toward curiosity, and keep him in a fallen, wondrous state indefinitely.

Schwartz’s focus on the role of memory in creation helps to elucidate one of the widest gaps between Adam and Eve’s final epistemic state and Satan’s. By the end of the poem, as I have demonstrated, it is clear that Adam and Eve are able to consult each other, integrating new information with old and proposing potential futures together. Schwartz argues that Satan on the other hand, cannot make this jump. Citing Hans Loewald, Schwartz notes that “repeating” can in fact be “an act of re-creating, the moment of generating new organization from something old” (Schwartz, 107). In her argument, the act of remembering is closely tied to recognition, which is another way that old knowledge is integrated into new. It is clear that humanity develops this multi-step epistemology moving from memory to recognition and finally to re-creation at the end of the poem. It is this epistemology that allows Adam and Eve to proceed into the world. Satan however, isn’t able to complete this process. Instead, his “memory is more selective,” which opens gaps in his epistemic process (Schwartz, 109). It is these gaps that prevent Satan from making the transition from being a “wondrous” creature to one that can express true curiosity.

This lack of memory is readily apparent when Satan first “meets” or “recalls” Sin and Death. Though Satan sired both figures, he doesn’t remember either of them, a remarkable elision from his memory. In fact, upon first encountering Death, Satan seeks to brush the figure aside so that he can continue on his way to Earth. Satan demands “Whence and what thou art, execrable shape, / That dar’st, though grim and terrible, advance / Thy miscreated front athwart my way / To yonder Gates?” (II, 681-685). Satan’s lack of recognition leads him to question Death, who responds by threatening Satan to return to his “punishment,” lest “with a whip of scorpions I pursue / Thy lingering” (II 701-702). This moment of escalating threat and violence
stems from Satan’s inability to remember his own offspring. It is not until Sin intervenes that the relationship between the beings is revealed. Even then, Satan remains suspicious of the veracity of her claims:

So strange thy outcry, and thy words so strange
Thou interposest, that my sudden hand
Prevented spares to tell thee yet by deeds
What it intends; till first I know of thee
What thing thou art, thus double formed, and why
In this infernal Vail first met thou call’st
Me Father, and that Fantasm call’st my Son?
I know thee not, nor ever saw till now
Sight more detestable than him and thee (II, 737-735).

Here, it is clear that Sin’s personage, relationship to Satan, and purpose remain a mystery. Her visage remains ugly to him, and he can’t remember who Sin is, or how she was begotten. This instance shows how Satan’s “selective memory,” allows him to elide his actions from both memory and from his reality. The trouble with this kind of faulty memory is that it shapes Satan’s interactions with his offspring. Instead of recognizing the pair as his own, Satan is ready to kill Death, and hesitates to kill Sin only because she pronounces a wild claim. While Satan might appear to be curious about who these figures are, “preventing” his “sudden hand” from killing Sin before he knows more about her, he does not inquire further about who she is, nor does he seem to fully grasp that she is his offspring and his lover (II, 738). When Sin walks
Satan through their relationship, he barely acknowledges her closeness to him. Sin recognizes his confusion, asking, “Hast thou forgotten me, and do I seem / Now in thine eye so foul, once deemed so fair / In Heav’n?” (II, 747-749). This reinforcement of Sin’s former fairness reinforces Satan’s forgetfulness, and suggests that there is even more to Sin and Satan’s story together than he remembers. By describing herself as “once fair,” Sin emphasizes the closeness that she and Satan had previously enjoyed. She continues on to remind Satan that their union produced offspring. In Sin’s account, Satan, “Becams’t enamoured, and such joy tou took’st / With me in secret and my womb concie’vd / A growing burden” (II, 765-767). That growing burden is Death. Even with this reminder, Satan cannot remember Sin or Death, and he forgets their prior relationship. By recounting her experience, Sin describes a union that was “joyous” in nature, and therefore unlikely to be forgotten. Yet, even in the face of a close personal connection, Satan manages to forget his relationship with Sin. This type of forgetting is a key component in hindering Satan’s progression to true curiosity. Instead of recognizing the consequences of his actions, Satan remains shocked and oblivious to his own culpability, and seems to be ignorant of his own role in the creation of these two formidable beings. If we take Schwartz’s argument into account, Satan’s poor memory becomes a fundamental flaw in Satan’s epistemology, and that he remains stunted as a result.

The gap between Satan’s recognition and his ability to integrate new information with old is reinforced as Satan further reacts to the seemingly new knowledge that Sin presents him with. In a situation where Satan is reminded of his daughter/lover and their incestuous offspring, it might follow that he would privilege her on the basis of their relationship. The reader almost expects apologies for Satan’s omitting his “joyous union” from memory, or might expect Satan to raise Sin to be a more equal figure, becoming his consort as well as his offspring. Instead, he
returns immediately to his reasoning for leaving Hell. There is scant mention of reparation for his forgetting, and he does not promise Sin any recompense for her wretched condition. He was already trying to make his way out of Hell, and he confirms that he will continue to do so. He lies to his spawn, claiming, “I come no enemie, but to set free / From out this dark and dismal house of pain, / Both him and thee, and all the heav’nly host / Of Spirits that in our just pretenses arm’d” (II, 823-825). Here, there is no privileging of Sin or Death; instead they become just like other demons. He doesn’t truly acknowledge their closer position to him than other demons, nor does he seem to recognize that he is responsible for the creation and continued status of either being.

I suggest that this forgetfulness is part of what prevents Satan from developing a truly curious epistemology. Instead of approaching Sin with questions, or instead of reshaping his future actions as a result of the new information that Sin provides him, Satan cues here that Sin’s tidings are inconsequential for him. Her reminders don’t change his interpretation of himself, nor do they influence his immediate actions. He also doesn’t approach her with any sort of curiosity. He asks her initially who she is, but doesn’t ask her anything past that first basic question. Though Sin presents a seemingly novel account of how she was begotten from Satan’s headache, he is not interested in why he created her, nor is he interested in any purpose that she might have defined for herself. This passive acceptance of her report suggests that Satan is not approaching her with true curiosity. Though Satan is the most “fallen” creature within the epic, his lack of soliloquy in this crucial and shocking moment suggests that his inner monologue resembles a musical track stuck in a loop. Instead of considering her information and using the new information to inform his actions and therefore his future, Satan immediately reverts to his pre-existing plan. The reader has no further information about his thoughts on Sin’s creation or on
his own forgetting of his daughter/lover. This lack of true introspection suggests that in this scene, Satan is unable to perform the same type of self-definition that made him fall in the first place. This lack of internal growth in this moment is reflected directly in his actions. Satan here “loops” back to the start of what he was already in the midst of before Sin interrupted him. He had already been seeking to “set free” all of those figures that in “just pretenses arm’d,” and he will continue to strive toward this goal (II, 822, 825). Though Satan seems unable to grasp consequences, this aversion to new knowledge also seems to suggest that he is also unable to integrate Sin’s new information with what he already knows. This instance where Satan shows his inability to approach a situation with true curiosity stands in comparison to Adam and Eve. Particularly as the pair negotiates their new circumstances, it might seem as though they are given more opportunities to break free from their own “looped” narrative.

This contrast is all the more marked given that the conditions that surround Satan are frequently conducive for the transition from “wonder” to true “curiosity.” As Benedict notes, curiosity at the time was considered intensely visual. Milton takes full advantage of this trait, and Satan is present during some of the most vividly visual scenes described throughout the poem. This visual stimulation is particularly clear as Satan observes the world present outside of Pandaemonium:

Of Eden, where delicious Paradise,
Now nearer, crowns with her enclosure green,
As with a rural mound the champaign head
Of a steep wilderness, whose hairy sides
With thicket overgrown, grotesque and wild,
Access denied; and over head up grew
Insuperable highth of loftiest shade,
Cedar, and pine, and fir, and branching palm
A sylvan scene, and as the ranks ascend
Shade above shade, a woody theatre
Of stateliest view. Yet higher then their tops
The verdurous wall of Paradise up sprung:
Which to our general sire gave prospect large
Into his nether Empire neighboring round (IV, 132-145).

Here, the visual nature of these observations is impossible to ignore. There are “green enclosures,” “sylvan scenes,” and a “woody theater” all present, and Milton describes Paradise in particularly visual terms. He even goes so far as to invoke a theater, the place where visual spectacle is produced. This is particularly important, as it presents Satan with the proper circumstances to develop a truly curious epistemology. With new visual input that he can experience personally, there is no reason why Satan shouldn’t be able to make observations and add new information to what he already knows. However, because of his cyclic epistemology, he is unable to synthesize this information in a productive way. Instead of learning anything new from his observations, he instead reverts to emotional exclamations about Paradise and his own damnation. In eliding information from his memory, and in not deeply observing his surroundings, Satan differs greatly from Adam and Eve. Once the first pair develop their reasoning skills, each is able to combine new knowledge with old, and transitions toward a truly curios epistemology. Satan on the other hand remains caught in a loop, even when he is given every opportunity to continue to develop. Though Satan falls much in the same way that Adam
and Eve do, he is unable or unwilling to continue to develop toward redemption, and as a result his epistemology remains uniform throughout the rest of the epic.

Satan’s epistemology remains static throughout his narrative within the poem. When first surveying the aftermath of his fall and his new, fallen state, Satan claims:

The mind is its own place, and in itself
Can make a Heav’n of Hell, and a Hell of Heav’n.
What matter where, if I be still the same,
And what I should be, all but less than he
Whom thunder hath made greater? Here at least
We shall be free; th’ Almighty hath it built
Here for his envy, will not drive us hence;
Here we may reign secure, and in my choice
To reign is worth ambition though in Hell:
Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heav’n. (I, 254-263)

This passage shows much of the Satan’s epistemology, which is difficult to separate from his worldview. In these lines, Satan is laying out his perception of hierarchy, and his own place within it. By stating that it is “Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heav’n,” he makes clear his rebellion against being a secondary, or non-prime figure. Even though Milton presents Satan from slightly different perspectives later in the epic, here the author first hints at Satan’s dedication to maintaining his worldview. He claims that location doesn’t matter: “What matter where,” for if Satan is “still the same,” he will maintain his same behavior. Milton displays this
same dynamic later, when Satan is first observing Eden. He asks himself “Hadst thou the same free will and power to stand? / Thou hadst: whom has thou then or what to accuse, / But Heav’n’s free love dealt equally to all?” (IV, 66-68). Satan recognizes that he had the same choice that all beings are given, and to obey God’s rule is to live in blessedness. And yet he continues on, cursing himself: “Nay cursed be thou; since against his thy will / Chose freely what it now so justly rues” (IV, 71-72). Satan is making his choice clear, underscoring the level of choice necessary to his epistemology. He made his choice, and he chose to fall. He confirms this choice later in the same passage, asking “Oh, then at last relent; is there no place/Left for repentance, none for pardon left? / None but by submission” (IV 79-81). This important acknowledgement that repentance is possible leads Satan to realize that the only route to repentance is a route that he refuses to take. He will not submit, and therefore cannot be redeemed. For him, “never can true reconcilement grow / Where wounds of deadly hate have pierced so deep” (IV, 98-100).

Almost from the outset of the epic, Milton presents a Satan who is prone to soliloquy. In fact, Satan’s inner monologue is so detailed that he becomes one of the most sympathetic characters throughout the early books of the poem. As Robertson notes, this tending toward emotion and the rich view of a complex inner life is particularly associated with fallen beings, and Satan is the prime example. As Adam and Eve progress, it would appear that their mode of discourse moves closer toward this Satanic mode, an argument that Robertson takes up. However, there are a few details that keep Adam and Eve from following Satan’s rhetoric fully. The best example of a figure taking on the types of questions that Satan offers comes from his temptation of Eve, and it is in that moment that she most closely mimics his epistemology.
In the moment just after temptation, Eve has been fully wooed by Satan’s promises of knowledge beyond measure. She has finally partaken of the fruit, and it is in this moment that she is in her most fallen state. As she contemplates whether to reveal her state to Adam, or whether to conceal it, she raises the point that being superior to Adam is “A thing not undesirable, sometime / Superior; for inferior who is free?” (IX, 824-825). This statement, especially her emphasis on her placement within hierarchy and freedom, sounds eerily similar to Satan’s thoughts on the same subjects. Thus, in this moment, it is clear that Eve has been beguiled into thinking like Satan, speaking like Satan, and transgressing like Satan. Because of these parallels, Eve brings about her own Fall. However, it is important to note that these similarities are bounded. Eve chooses this mode of expression for a short time, eventually progressing beyond Satan’s mode of expression. Though Eve is susceptible to Satan’s wiles, she later shows a proclivity toward problem-solving and redemption that moves her beyond Satan.

Though Adam and Eve are temporarily driven apart by their choice, at the end of the epic, the two must reconcile with each other to face their new reality. By working together to propose new futurities, Eve in particular moves past the Satanic emphasis on her position, instead choosing to focus on how she and Adam can create a life together. This emphasis on how to move forward is one of the major contrasts between Eve and Satan. In a striking departure from Satan’s cyclic favoring of the fallen life, Eve and Adam instead choose redemption. The first step in this redemptive life is to “fall prostrate” before God (X, 1999). Though it is Adam who suggests this action, it is clear that Eve feels just as remorseful as he: “nor Eve/ Felt less remorse; they forthwith to the place/ Repairing where he judged them prostrate fell/ Before him reverent, and both confessed/ Humbly their faults, and pardon begged” (X, 1097-1102). This step
toward penitence and apology moves Adam and Eve away from the cycle of fallenness that Satan represents, and instead shifts the pair back toward God and godliness.

This shift that transitions Adam and Eve into their new life leads not only to godliness, but also to redemption. While Satan claims that he can “make a Heav’n of Hell,” he is instead condemned to eternal suffering by his choices (I, 254). On the other hand, Adam and Eve’s penitence leads Michael to promise to Adam that even when being forced to leave Eden, the couple “shalt possess/ A paradise within thee, happier far” (XII, 586-587). In choosing to reinvest themselves in God, Adam and Eve are able to begin the slow process of regeneration and redemption. Eve acknowledges her unique position, noting, “though by all by me is lost / Such favor I unworthy am vouchsafed, / By me the promised seed shall all restore” (XII, 622-624). By using their new close reading skills to reinterpret their punishment, Adam and Eve are able to move toward regeneration and restoration. This option is closed to Satan, as he never completes his cyclical fall, choosing over and over again to remain in his fallen state. McColley notes how Milton “invites a renewal of the imagination by recreating a paradisal life” for Adam and Eve (McColley, 2). Though there is new possibility in the new fallen world, it takes “those faculties and capacities for fullest use” to bring about the process of regeneration (McColley, 2). Thus, Adam and Eve require the fullest extent of their new and more developed epistemologies in order to negotiate the process of regeneration. Though curiosity brought about their fall, it also brings about their salvation. This turn shows that even though Adam and Eve teeter on the brink of Satanic reasoning, they turn toward redemption instead of following Satan’s epistemic lead.
Conclusions

Throughout my analysis, I have drawn attention to Eve and Adam’s changing epistemologies, which I suggest develop throughout the poem. This methodology closely follows the example set by Fish and Schwartz, who also describe the changes wrought in the pair as a result of the Fall, and trace the epistemological repercussions. Fish in particular suggests that the poem is educational, and that just as Adam and Eve grow sadder and wiser, so too does the reader gain knowledge throughout the reading process. While the reading has been an influential analysis of Paradise Lost, my own arguments build from, and eventually diverge from Fish’s. Though Fish maintains a focus upon the reader and their education, I feel that closer attention to the major human characters with the poem shows Milton’s even greater concern with educating the characters within. By focusing narrowly on the subject of how the reader should interact with the poem, Fish fails to record the important shifts to Adam and Eve’s epistemologies.

This omission is the result of fact that Fish maintains that there are only two lapsarian positions, pre and post. Reading the poem in such a binary way has significant moral implications for Fish, especially as it pertains to the education of the reader. By delineating the poem into these two distinct periods, Fish argues that all readers are in effect fallen, and that the fallen nature of our reading perpetuates the “surprising” nature of sin. Just as Adam and Eve were beguiled by Satan, so too is the reader. In this argument, this surprise is the reason that modern, fallen readers find Satan to be such a relatable figure. However, for all of Fish’s focus upon education, his argument leaves little room for true learning. Because of the reader’s post-lapsarian position, it is already impossible to recover the meaning of pre-lapsarian language. Thus, even as the reader is exposed to example after example of false Satanic verse, it is
seemingly impossible not to be wooed by it. This repetition suggests that the reader is unwilling or unable to learn substantively from the text. If pre-lapsarian language is lost before the narrative begins, what is gained through recounting its loss? Fish’s treatment of education throughout the poem, Adam and Eve’s changes throughout the poem are minimized in favor of the reader’s education. In a view that separates epistemologies into only innocent and fallen, there is no room to fully explore the pair’s potential. Instead, Adam and Eve are destined to fall, even before the poem introduces them. The simplistic demarcation between pre-fall and post overlooks the process by which knowledge is built. Fish’s methodology, which has come to dominate studies of Paradise Lost, obscures Milton’s descriptions of how Adam and Eve eventually achieve understanding and finally redemption. Because Milton’s Christian reader already knows the fate of Adam and Eve, it is precisely that how that matters.

Where Fish is correct is in the fact that Milton participates in efforts to fix moral judgment upon language usage. As Benedict argues, the very definition of curiosity was continuously being transformed, as was the moral implication of the term from as early as 1650 through 1820 (Benedict, 2). I would like to suggest that Milton uses Adam and Eve’s epistemological transformation to set the moral stakes for curiosity, and to define and evaluate the term fully. Recognizing the complexities with which Milton imbues curiosity with is possible only when we perceive Adam and Eve’s changing epistemologies as a developmental range as opposed to a strict pre/post-lapsarian binary. At the outset of the poem, it seems that Milton’s judgment of curiosity condemns its practice. Eve is reminded not to reach beyond her comprehension, and Satan is able to manipulate her through the promise of knowledge. However, this judgment begins to change as the poem continues, and the Milton underscores the importance of understanding. It is curiosity that allows Adam and Eve to break free from the
Satanic cycle of sin, and allows them to imagine and evaluate new futures, and it is curiosity that allows them to recognize where they erred and seek redemption.

By the end of the poem, Milton clearly deems curiosity a process necessary in gaining suitable wisdom to know temptation. This wisdom to discern between salvation and sin is what Fish suggests that Milton is trying to inspire in the reader, and I propose that it is also what Milton develops in Adam and Eve. Milton is a firm believer in the cultivation of wisdom. As he states in *Aeropagitica*, “what wisdom can there be to choose, what continence to forbear without the knowledge of evil? He that can apprehend and consider vice with all her baits and seeming pleasures, and yet abstain, and yet distinguish, and yet prefer that which is truly better, he is the true warfaring Christian” (Kerrigan, Rumrich, Fallon, 939). This strong sentiment reinforces Milton’s opinion on a knowing, experienced wisdom as an absolutely necessary trait in the true Christian. I posit that throughout *Paradise Lost*, Milton implies that curiosity is the only way to develop such wisdom. Though it might have been the search for knowledge that first tempted humankind, it is also what leads to eternal redemption. Thus, what might seem morally ambiguous becomes a necessary process. That is not to say that curiosity is not without its pitfalls. As Karen Edwards underscores, there is a fine distinction between “bad science,” or the falsification of information, and redemptive curiosity. And yet, it is this very distinction that Milton has Adam and Eve learn. Throughout their various epistemic stages, Milton continuously reinforces the importance of progressively adding new information to old experiences and evaluating the claims that would be hucksters present in beguiling language, warning Adam, Eve, and eventually the reader to be vigilant in their own epistemic pursuits.

Though curiosity can lead to sin, it is also the most necessary process that is required for the development of true, Christian wisdom. In penning *Paradise Lost*, Milton provides a detailed
explication of the first development of curiosity, and reinforces its importance in the salvation of humanity. Thus, throughout the epic, even as we are reminded to remain evaluative and cautious, Milton invites us to remain curious.
Bibliography


