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"Nor turnd I weene": *Paradise Lost* and Pre-Lapsarian Sexuality

Kent R. Lehnhof

Generations of Milton scholars have agreed that *Paradise Lost* asserts a genital conjugality between Adam and Eve prior to the Fall. Critical consensus has been so extensive that Adam and Eve's sexual intimacy is a veritable non-question in Milton criticism. For this reason, few Miltonists have analyzed the physical specifics of Adam and Eve's relationship. Of the examinations that have been made, Peter Lindenbaum's "Lovemaking in Milton's Paradise" and James Grantham Turner's *One Flesh*¹ are the most thorough. Tellingly, neither Lindenbaum nor Turner acknowledges that pre-lapsarian sex in *Paradise Lost* is anything other than an indubitable fact. Turner claims from the outset that "Milton . . . insists on a full sexual life for the unfallen Adam and Eve—bringing it to life as fully as his poetic resources allow" (12), and Lindenbaum declares in the first line of his essay: "In *Paradise Lost*, Milton took the unusual stand of asserting that Adam and Eve engaged in sexual relations while still in Eden before the Fall" (277). Because the "unusual stand" of pre-lapsarian sex has been such a commonplace in Milton criticism, neither Lindenbaum nor Turner provide evidence in favor of this apparent fact—there is no reason to defend a position that nobody disputes. Lindenbaum, for example, assumes that Milton's take on Edenic sexuality is obvious to all and quickly moves to the essay's real focus: the implications of Adam and Eve's sexual life for *Paradise Lost* as a whole (278). In a similar fashion, Turner declares an intention to illuminate through historical contextualization Milton's position on pre-lapsarian sexuality, but never acknowledges that Milton's position might be a matter of debate (vi). Based on the unexamined assertion of Edenic sexuality, both texts perfectly encapsulate the analytical process that Milton scholars have adopted when addressing pre-Fall eroticism. Rather than argue *for* Adam and Eve's pre-lapsarian sexuality (establishing that the couple did copulate in Eden); we have merely argued *from* it (explaining how the couple's alleged intimacy illuminates other aspects of Milton's oeuvre).

Yet Turner's own work suggests the dangers of taking such an easy approach to conjugality in *Paradise Lost*. In

the preface to *One Flesh*, Turner claims that the biblical source text of Milton's epic is characterized by a fundamental "indeterminacy" resulting in a fragmented text "that must be, and yet cannot be, read as one" (vii). Turner acknowledges that the Bible is particularly cloudy on the question of Adam and Eve's intimacy in the Garden of Eden. Turner also avows that his idea or "version of Milton . . . shares the current tendency to stress his inconsistency and doubleness" (ix). But neither Milton's inconsistency and doubleness nor the Bible's indeterminacy has the slightest effect on Turner's convictions regarding pre-lapsarian sexuality in *Paradise Lost*. Although he enumerates a number of causes for caution, Turner shrugs off all uncertainty regarding sex in Eden, unwaveringly proclaiming that in Milton's epic, "the first couple live for weeks in Paradise enjoying full sexual intercourse" (30).

While Turner never doubts that Milton explicitly affords Adam and Eve an Edenic sexuality, there are times when his text unwittingly raises suspicion to the contrary. These moments occur when Turner is forced to insist upon Milton's radical originality in attributing to Adam and Eve the specific type of conjugal relations that Turner perceives in *Paradise Lost*. *One Flesh* plumbs the writings and traditions of a remarkable array of thinkers from widely divergent historical, religious, and cultural viewpoints. Turner's reading of the sexuality in *Paradise Lost*, however, often requires that he set Milton at odds with every other ideologue included in his study. For example, at one point Turner asserts that of all the theologians considered in *One Flesh* "only Milton attempts to create a new significance for the Eden-myth without reversing or abandoning the standard ideology of the text" (140). At another point Turner tells us that "belief in the Paradisal trace was never strong enough to dislodge the orthodox position, that Adam and Eve were virgins at the expulsion; *Paradise Lost* is unique and isolated in this respect" (79). Although *One Flesh* aims to situate Milton's stance on sexuality within social, literary, and theological contexts, Turner's take on Miltonic sexuality often neces-

sitates that he perform the opposite action, severing Milton from these very contexts. I hesitate to embrace Turner's faith in pre-lapsarian sexuality when such a position requires me to concur, as Turner acknowledges that it does, that Milton "violates the universal consensus of the commentators, not to mention the laws of biological probability, when he gives Adam and Eve a full but infertile sexual life in Paradise" (37).

The vague discomfort that I find between the lines of *One Flesh* is certainly not sufficient to discredit a reading as dominant as the one that locates a pre-lapsarian conjugality in *Paradise Lost*. Uncertainty within the text of *Paradise Lost* itself, however, supplies ampler cause for question. I speak specifically of Book 4. Turner, Lindenbaum, and others point to lines 738–743 of this book as a straightforward—indeed, indubitable—account of Edenic lovemaking. The passage relates that after their nightly prayer, Adam and Eve:

into thir inmost bowre
Handed they went; and eas'd the putting off
These troublesom disguises which wee wear,
Strait side by side were laid, nor turn'd I weene
Adam from his fair Spouse, nor *Eve* the Rites
Mysterious of connubial Love refus'd.

(738–743)²

Turner's explication of these lines is detailed and nuanced, mining a great deal of meaning out of single words and phrases. He discourses at length upon the significance of words such as "Strait" and "Rites" (236–37). Turner's painstaking word-by-word analysis, however, fails to attend to the two words upon which the passage depends. As Roy Flannagan points out in *The Riverside Milton*, the "I weene" that precedes the description of the "Rites / Mysterious" introduces an uncertainty that Turner and others have ignored. Flannagan's footnote to line 741 observes that "strictly speaking, Milton does not assert that Adam and Eve made love, since 'I weene' means 'I assume' or 'I guess.'" In short, the straightforward sexuality of these lines is not so much a product of the text but rather of our inattention to it. The all but overlooked ambiguity of "I weene" justifies an exploration into what has for centuries been a non-question: "Did Adam and Eve have sex in *Paradise Lost* prior to the Fall?"

My re-examination of the issue begins where Lindenbaum begins: the theological problems associated with pre-lapsarian sexuality. As Lindenbaum notes, in 1712 Daniel Defoe raised specific questions about the inclusion of pre-lapsarian sexual relations in *Paradise Lost*. Defoe has trouble accepting sex in the Garden because such sex

would necessarily have been perfect, and perfect sex would invariably have ended in conception. Yet Eve could not have conceived in Eden because any child conceived prior to the Fall would not have been tainted by original sin—as Cain undeniably was (638).³ Because Lindenbaum is secure in the assumption that Milton afforded Adam and Eve a pre-Fall sexual life, he does not feel compelled to respond to the difficulties Defoe delineates. His abbreviated attempt to handle Defoe's questions is relegated to an endnote. It would be wise, however, to reconsider the merit of Defoe's theological concerns, for Milton is not the type of thinker to dismiss or discount the real doctrinal difficulty of Defoe's position.

In spite of its apparent logic, Defoe's analysis need not preclude sex from Milton's Paradise, for Milton does not share several of the premises upon which Defoe's speculations are predicated. First, Defoe asserts that if Eve were to have sex in Eden "she must have Conceived, for Barrenness seem'd not to consist with the State of Perfection" (638). Equating a delay in conception with an inability to conceive, Defoe admits no gap between act and issue. Milton's Eden, however, allows for innocent delay. Milton's God, for example, knows from the outset that it is not good for man to be alone. Nevertheless, God—a perfect agent engaging in perfect acts of creation—does not provide man with his needed companion until after man recognizes his lack, petitions his Creator to supply that lack, and then successfully debates the wisdom of his petition. Additionally, when God eventually creates Eve to remedy Adam's deficiency, delay is once more introduced. Rather than join her mate and alleviate his solitude, Eve prolongs Adam's loneliness, first lingering by the pool and then fleeing from his side when led to him. Only when forcibly detained does Eve finally fulfill her companionate role. In spite of these repeated delays, neither God's postponement of Eve's creation nor Eve's tardiness in joining Adam diminishes the perfection of Eden; both God and Eve are blameless in their belatedness. Allowing for innocent delay, Milton's Garden can accommodate postponement and deferral—including sexual encounters that do not instantly result in conception. In the same way that Eve need not immediately fulfill the purpose for her existence (to provide companionship for Adam), sex need not immediately fulfill the purpose for its existence (to provide offspring for Adam and Eve).

Second, Defoe's notion of the paradisaical perfection diverges from Milton's. In short, Defoe commits the

error identified by Barbara Lewalski in "Innocence and Experience in Milton's Eden": distorting the nature of Adam and Eve's pre-lapsarian existence by incorrectly conflating Milton's Eden with the Edens of archetypal myth and traditional theology. Defoe defines Edenic perfection in terms of absolute presence and teleological attainment, but this type of perfection does not coincide with Milton's Paradise.⁴ Milton's Garden, Lewalski avers, "effect[s] a redefinition of the State of Innocence which is a very far cry from the stable, serene completeness attributed to that state both in myth and traditional theology" (88). Perfection in Milton's Eden is not a state of being but rather a process of being, a process of growth. And this process not only tolerates the delays described above but, as Lewalski observes, even accommodates "mistake, misjudgment, and error" (99). Indeed, the process of growth that informs Milton's idea of perfection depends upon "departures from the expected" (99). Noting that Adam and Eve repeatedly fail to get things right the first time, Lewalski observes: "Normally . . . they respond to a new situation by one or two false starts or false guesses before they find or are led to the proper stance. But this human growth by trial and error, like the excessive growth of the Garden, is wholly without prejudice, so long as they prune and direct and reform what grows amiss" (100). In Milton's pre-lapsarian Garden, then, Eve's failure to conceive on the first sexual encounters is not an implausibility. Indeed, it is to be expected—just another case of the "one or two false starts" that inheres in all other aspects of Adam and Eve's Edenic behavior.

And lastly, Defoe's idea of Edenic sexuality assumes that procreation is the only purpose for sexual intimacy.⁵ *Paradise Lost*, on the other hand, conveys an ampler vision. Procreation is not the only end the epic allows; an equally acceptable purpose for sex is the expression of love between partners. This latter purpose is, after all, the only purpose Adam acknowledges in his question to Raphael regarding angelic embraces:

Bear with me then, if lawful what I ask;
Love not the heav'nly Spirits, and *how thir Love*
Express they, by looks onely, or do they mix
Irradiance, virtual or immediate touch?
(8.614–17; my emphasis)

Although Raphael has been quick to correct what he perceives to be Adam's errors in interpreting interpersonal relationships, he does not amend Adam's assumption that lovemaking is legitimate as an expression of love. Rather,

the angel enlarges upon Adam's question, explaining that angels enjoy a sublime sexuality.⁶ His answer adopts Adam's initial premise that sex can have a purpose other than propagation. Indeed, we may be reasonably certain that angels do not even have the ability to procreate. The epic nowhere alludes to angelic progeny, and every angel whose origin is identified was created by God and not by copulating angels.⁷ If angels are unable to reproduce, angelic lovemaking has no purpose other than the expression of affection. Nevertheless, their non-propagative sexuality is not for this reason curtailed: "obstacle [they] find none" (8.624).

Allowing for delay, false starts, and non-reproductive sexuality, Milton is not prevented from portraying pre-lapsarian sexuality by theological problems of the type Defoe delineates. Even so, repeated references to Eve's virginity indicate that the epic nevertheless does not allow Edenic conjugality. According to the nearly unanimous interpretation of the epic's eroticism, Adam and Eve most likely have sex on the very first night of Eve's existence. According to most readers, the latest possible date for marital consummation is the night of Eve's dream in Book 4. A full five books after this alleged consummation, however, Eve is still described as virginal. In Book 9 the narrator identifies Eve as "the Virgin Majestie" (270), and similar assertions of Eve's virginity proliferate from that point. Lines 393–96, for example, compare Eve to other women notable for their virginity:

To *Pales*, or *Pomona* thus adorned,
Likest she seemed, *Pomona* when she fled
Vertumnus, or to *Ceres* in her Prime,
Yet Virgin of *Proserpina* from *Jove*.

The passage emphasizes the virginity of all the women involved; the principal similarity between Eve, Pomona, and Ceres is the fact that they are all "yet Virgin." Later in the book, the Garden's reaction to Eve's approach is equated with the way all pastoral fields react to virgin maids. Explaining that nature responds to the footsteps of a "fair Virgin" with an increase of beauty ("If chance with Nymphlike step fair Virgin pass, / What pleasing seemd, for her now pleases more" [9.452–53]), the narrator notes that Eden reaches the height of resplendence when Eve nears, once more suggesting that Eve has up to now abstained from intercourse.

These seemingly straightforward refutations of Edenic sexual activity are furthered on a symbolic level by images that invoke conventions that conceptualize

maidenhood as a flower. The association between blossoms and a woman's sexual body, commonplace in literature, is crucial to Milton's epic, for Eve's relation to the flowers in Eden is more than mere convention. As Diane McColley has emphasized, Milton gives Eve an unprecedented amount of governance over the flowers of Eden. Adam names the animals, but Eve names the flowers. This "unheard of" assertion is compounded by the equally outrageous depiction of Eve as "a gardener even more committed and original than Adam" ("Eve and the Arts of Eden" 104). Eve's intense involvement in the plant life of Eden is readily discernible in the description of Eve's nursery. In Book 4, Milton explains that Adam and Eve possess all things in common; the marital claim they make on one another is the only kind of ownership in Eden (750–52). In apparent contradiction of this account, Book 8 insists that Eve is the exclusive proprietor of the nursery she visits during Adam and Raphael's discussion: Eve "Rose, and went forth among her Fruits and Flours, / To visit how they prosper'd, bud and bloom, / *Her Nurserie*" (40, 44–46; my emphasis). The two meanings of "nursery"—a site for the care-taking of plants and a site for the care-taking of children—are conflated as the plants anthropomorphically enjoy Eve's attention: "They at her coming sprung / And toucht by her fair tendance gladlier grew" (45–46). Taking on the role of Eve's children (the fruits of her womb), the plants of the nursery demonstrate the indivisibility between Eve and the garden itself. The pathetic fallacy employed in this episode recurs throughout the epic, as the boundaries between Eve's body and the vegetative realm are blurred.⁸ Once we recognize the connection between Eve and Eden's flowers, and the conventional way in which flowers represent maidenhood, we cannot ignore the floral elements of the bower scene in Book 4. After speculating that Eve might not have "the Rites / Mysterious of connubial Love refus'd," the poem indicates that Adam and Eve, "lull'd by Nightingales imbraceing slept, / And on their naked limbs the flourie roof / Show'd Roses, which the Morn repair'd" (771–73). The roses of the bower, the floral corollary of Eve's maidenhood, are undamaged by the evening's activities. Denying that any defloration has taken place, the symbolic flowers of the bower argue against the idea that Adam and Eve have sex prior to the Fall.

A few readers, however, have suggested that virginal rhetoric in Milton need not be read as a refutation of sexual activity. Mother Mary Pecheux, for instance, notes the references to virginity in Book 9 but continues to contend that Eve was "not a virgin in the literal sense at

the time of the temptation." In her view, Milton mobilizes virginal maidens and virginal epithets not to define Eve's sexual status but rather her typological status. Desiring to connect the Fall of humanity with the eventual Redemption of humanity, Milton strives to tie together the women central to each event. In order to connect our first mother to the virgin mother, Milton endows Eve with a virginity that is rhetorical rather than real—what Pecheux calls a "spiritual virginity" (361–62).

John Leonard has also argued that virginity in Miltonic contexts need not require sexual abstinence. Attempting to temper the "cult of celibacy" that has attached itself to Milton's early career, Leonard carefully sorts through the references Milton makes in his early writings to the choir of 144,000 virgins described in Revelations. In his discussion of *Ad Patrem*, Leonard shows that it is not inconceivable that Milton places his father in this choir of virgins. The fact that a father can be considered virginal suggests that Milton's concept of virginity allows for chaste sexual activity within marriage ("Milton's Vow of Celibacy" 197). Leonard avers that this idea of virginity also appears in Milton's *Mask*. To support this claim, Leonard enlists the aid of R.M. Frye, who points out that "virginity" in early modern Puritan usage can include marital sexuality. Frye demonstrates this usage by citing Calvin's *Institutes*, where two kinds of virginity are identified, the first being abstinence and the second being the chaste love of marriage ("*species secunda virginitatis, est matrimonii casta dilectio*"). According to Leonard, both of these definitions are active in Milton's masque: "As the fifteen-year-old Lady appeals to the 'sage / And serious doctrine of Virginity,' she is thinking primarily of the first kind of virginity, but her word 'Virginity' need not amount to an out-and-out rejection of the second kind" ("Good Things" 124). Leonard believes that the conceptualization of marital sexuality as virginal becomes more overt as Milton matures. In this reading, the virginal rhetoric applied to Eve in *Paradise Lost* clearly refers to Calvin's second form of virginity ("Good Things" 126 n.5). If Leonard is correct in the belief that Milton considers faithfully monogamous yet sexually active spouses virginal, then *Paradise Lost's* insistence on Eve's virginity need not deny an Edenic sexuality.

Leonard's ideas regarding the Miltonic category of virginity returns us to the roses of the bower. Although I have just read the undamaged roses as a denial of defloration, it is also possible to interpret them as an affirmation of defloration. The fact that the roses must be restored or "repair'd" indicates that the activities in

the bower alter or compromise their original condition (as we colloquially claim, there is no need to repair that which is not broken). The way in which the roses are shed and then restored might not refute the existence of sexuality in the bower so much as refute the idea that such sexuality stains or defiles the participants. Milton's virginal images might mean to emphasize not the absence of pre-lapsarian sexuality but rather its purity. If this is the case, then the bower scene can be seen as an imaginative expression of Augustine's theological speculation that in pre-lapsarian intercourse "the integrity of the female genital organ [would be] preserved." Although Augustine does not believe that Adam and Eve actually make love before the Fall, he believes that they could have done so. Imagining what this paradisiacal copulation would have been like, Augustine reasons:

In such happy circumstances and general human well-being we should be far from suspecting that offspring could not have been begotten without the disease of lust With calmness of mind and with no corrupting of the integrity of the body, the husband would lie upon the bosom of his wife Thus must we believe that the male semen could have been introduced into the womb of the wife with the integrity of the female genital organ being preserved. (14.26)

Perhaps Milton has in mind just such an act of virginity-preserving penetration when he writes of roses that are repaired in the same instant as they are plucked.

Augustine's perspectives on pre-lapsarian conjugality might also inform another scene of Edenic intimacy. In Book 4 we read of Adam and Eve's afternoon refreshment:

They sat them down, and . . .
 . . . to thir Supper Fruits they fell,
 Nectarine Fruits which the compliant boughes
 Yielded to them, side-long as they sat recline
 On the soft downie Bank damask't with flours:
 .
 Nor gentle purpose, nor endearing smiles
 Wanted, nor youthful dalliance as beseems
 Fair couple, linkt in happie nuptial League,
 Alone as they. About them frisking playd
 All Beast of th' Earth . . .
 Sporting the Lion rampd, and in his paw
 Dandl'd the Kid; Bears, Tygers, Ounces, Pards
 Gambold before them, th' unwieldy Elephant
 To make them mirth us'd all his might, and wreathd

His lithe Proboscis; close the Serpent sly
 Insinuating, wove with Gordian twine
 His breadd train. (327, 331–34, 337–41, 343–49)

In his discussion of Adam and Eve's sexual life, Edward LeComte points to this passage and glibly observes: "Reclining on a flowery bank they sup on fruit and on each other" (91). LeComte's analysis, however, does not surpass this single sentence, and I do not believe that any other Miltonist has examined in detail the eroticism of this particular afternoon in Eden. The oversight is surprising, for there is much in the passage suggestive of sexuality.

Throughout the epic, sexuality is repeatedly associated with food and eating. The convergence of these two appetites is most clearly seen in the aphrodisiac effects of the forbidden fruit. The forbidden fruit, for instance, has sexual as well as digestive effects, serving as an aphrodisiac that enflames carnal desire. Burning with a lust borne of the fruit, Adam attempts to move Eve to "dalliance" with an invitation steeped in references to eating. After talk of "taste," "tasting," "Sapience," "savour," "Palate, and "true relish," Adam tells Eve: "But come, so well refresh't, now let us play, / As meet is, after such delicious Fare" (9). Adam's assertion that sex follows refreshment perhaps illuminates the events of Book 4, for Book 4 seems to allow for the same eating / sex schema that informs Book 9. The structural similarity of these two scenes is bolstered by lexical echoes between the two accounts. In Book 9, Adam and Eve's meal of fruit is followed by explicitly sexual "dalliance" (1016). In Book 4, Adam and Eve's meal of fruit is similarly succeeded by "youthful dalliance" (338). That the dalliance in Book 4, like the dalliance in Book 9, is genital in nature is indicated by the claim that this dalliance is of the kind that "beseems / Fair couple, linkt in happie nuptial League, / Alone as they" (338–40). If Book 4's dalliance is the type of amorousness reserved for *married* couples who are *alone*, it is perhaps appropriate to construe such activity as sexual, for, as Augustine observes, nothing seeks seclusion so much as sexuality: "And rather will a man endure a crowd of witnesses when he is unjustly venting his anger on some one, than the eye of one man when he innocently copulates with his wife" (14.19).⁹

The sexual specificity of this supper-time scene is also suggested by the presence of the frisking animals. Cavorting before Adam and Eve in order to "make them mirth," the animals are anthropomorphized, transformed into Edenic jesters. In this figurative humanization of

animal life, the distance between man and beast is decreased. Foregrounding the harmoniousness of humans and animals in Eden, the poem downplays the differences between both, and Adam and Eve merge with the rest of God's creatures in the Garden. The convergence of humanity and animality reinforces the sexuality of the scene, for we later learn that animals have but two concerns: food and sex (9.571–74).¹⁰ Linked in this scene to the animals of Eden environment, Adam and Eve become linked to the two concerns that characterize all Edenic inhabitants. The suggestion seems to be that on this afternoon Adam and Eve, like all the other creatures God has placed in the Garden, innocently and appropriately satisfy the two appetites that beset them: food, first, and then sex—"As meet is, after such delicious fare."

We have already noted how Augustine's ideas about pre-lapsarian virginity perhaps explain the roses in Book 4. Augustine's ideas about pre-lapsarian genitalia might also explain the frolicking elephant and serpent that appear later in that same book. According to Augustine, Edenic sexuality would not have depended upon either lust or involuntary sexual response. Adam would not have needed to rely upon the tumescence of arousal in order to couple with his wife. Instead, Adam would have enjoyed complete control over his generative member, directing it as easily as his feet and hands:

Do we now move our feet and hands when we will to do the things we would by means of these members? do we meet with no resistance in them, but perceive that they are ready servants of the will . . . And shall we not believe that, like as all those members obediently serve the will, so also should the members have discharged the function of generation, though lust, the award of disobedience, had been awanting? . . . Those members, like all the rest, should have obeyed the will. The field of generation should have been sown by the organ created for this purpose, as the earth is sown by the hand. (14.23)

It is possible that the phallic symbols of the elephant's trunk and the serpent's length allude to this Edenic ability to control the genitals. Insinuating a sexuality into the scene, the serpent coils his body and the elephant wields his proboscis with the exact same dexterity that Adam reportedly enjoys in the manipulation of his penis.

Nectarines, elephant trunks and snaky coils, however, can hardly be considered definitive indicators of sexual activity between Adam and Eve. In fact, it is possible to construe the scene of afternoon refreshment as a denial of

such activity. For instance, it is now commonplace in Milton criticism to recognize that Milton describes Eden in sin-tainted terms whose wicked connotations are exploited not to suggest the existence of sin in Eden but rather to emphasize its absence. Eve's "wanton ringlets" are but one of many famous instances. As many critics have noted, Milton deliberately draws upon the concupiscent meanings of "wanton" in order to emphasize the complete absence of carnality in Eve's pre-lapsarian appearance. Phrases akin to Eve's "wanton curls" permeate the poem, as Milton repeats the same pattern of suggesting sinfulness in order to refute sinfulness. The parallels between Books 4 and 9 perhaps participate in this strategy. In other words, the ways in which Books 4 and 9 mirror each other might not establish a sexual similarity between the two episodes but rather insist upon their difference. In Book 9, the word "dalliance" undeniably deploys deviant and lascivious denotations. In Book 4, however, the same word cannot carry such inflections. Indeed, the qualification of Book 4's dalliance as "youthful" strives to make explicit this denial, underscoring the child-like innocence of Adam and Eve's actions. If the text insists that what takes place in Book 4 is not identical to what takes place in Book 9, we are perhaps unwise to assume that the sexual intercourse that occurs in Book 9 also occurs in Book 4. In short, we have assumed that Milton's pre-lapsarian descriptions aim to exclude the *sinfulness* of Book 9's sexuality, but these descriptions might also seek to exclude the *sexuality* of Book 9's sinfulness. In the same way that "wanton" cannot be read in a sexual fashion prior to the Fall, "dalliance" might also resist a sexual reading until after the fruit has been plucked and eaten.

The afternoon repast, of course, is not the epic's only scene of intimacy. In fact, it is not the only amorous episode in Book 4. The events following Eve's birth narration also cultivate an erotic reading. Concluding the tale of her own genesis with praise for Adam's "manly grace," Eve "surrender[s]" to "conjugal attraction unprov'd":

half imbracing [she] leand
On our first Father, half her swelling Breast
Naked met his under the flowing Gold
Of her loose tresses hid: he in delight
Both of her Beauty and submissive Charms
Smil'd with superior Love, as *Jupiter*
On *Juno* smiles, when he impregns the Clouds
That shed *May* Flowers; and press'd her Matron lip
With kisses pure. (490–502)

In contrast to the veiled phallicism of dexterous proboscises, the genital sensuality of this passage seems to be open and unmistakable. References to fatherhood, nakedness, swelling breasts, and impregnation direct the reader to carnal conclusions.¹¹ But the reader who attends to the classical allusion is arrested in this eroticized understanding of Adam and Eve's behavior. As Diane McColley observes, the sexuality of Juno and Jove can have little relation to Adam and Eve, for the lovemaking of the mythic gods is predicated upon deceit, adultery, and aggression: "Juno seduces Jove with the devious purpose of distracting him from the war, and Jove woos Juno by the doubtful persuasion that neither she nor the partners of his many adulteries (whom he names) ever before 'did wound / My entrails to such depth as now with thirst of amorous ease.'" As McColley indicates: "Bitter conflict . . . is the real context of Juno's deceitful seduction of Jove" (*Milton's Eve* 65–66).

In order to explain the jarring inconsistency between Jupiter and Juno's intimacy and Adam and Eve's, McColley asserts that Milton uses the sinful sexuality of the mythic gods to force the reader into recognizing the sinless sexuality of the biblical parents. Contrasting Eden's spotlessness with Ida's debauchery, Milton "sorts out the devious sexuality of the pagan gods from the innocent sexuality of Adam and Eve." The seamy underside of the simile vividly "paints out" . . . the differences between fallen, exploitative, divisive forms of sexuality on the one hand and unfallen and regenerate love, in harmony with all creation, on the other." McColley's reading, in other words, excludes from Eden Juno and Jove's sinfulness but includes their sexuality. According to McColley, the comparison between Ida and Eden prepares for later moments in which "chaste sexual love is frankly praised as the crowning pleasure of Paradise" (*Milton's Eve* 66).

If we view with some skepticism McColley's claim that sex is the crowning paradisaal pleasure, we might revise McColley's reading in a way that rejects rather than instantiates sexual intercourse in Eden. It is plausible that the simile in Book 4 aims not simply to exclude the sinfulness of Juno and Jove's interaction but also the sexuality of that interaction. Milton's simile concludes, for instance, in a manner that seems intent on renouncing Edenic conjugality. The passage's steamy eroticism ends rather abruptly with the decidedly unsexy term "Matron" and the tame task of pressing "kisses pure." Although "Matron" might be meant to indicate Eve's sexual experience (the OED indicates that one of the word's available meanings is "a married woman considered as having expert knowledge in matters of childbirth,

pregnancy, etc"), the readerly experience of the word has precisely the opposite effect. As LeComte complains, "Matron" is "a tardy, slightly jarring note of sobriety" that sharply contrasts with "the soft Lydian airs that went before" (92). Truncating the amorousness of the episode with this abstemious epithet, Milton undermines the passage's eroticism. Having worked the fallen reader into a state of arousal, Milton reins it all in, restricting Adam and Eve's intimacy to a chaste kiss specifically limited to the lips. Deliberately denying the full libidinal indulgence we have been led to expect, the passage rapidly contracts, austere disavowing genital involvement. In this way, the simile might best be understood as a titillating trap into which we repeatedly stumble. Inviting us to voyeuristically envision a sexual component to Adam and Eve's relationship, the simile's jarring conclusion forces us to acknowledge the lustful and fallen nature of our interpellations into Eden. In fact, the self-conscious discomfort that we feel when we are frustrated in our erotic pleasure reminds us that we are at this point occupying the exact same subjective position as Satan, who is also watching Adam and Eve's conjugal converse and envying their "short pleasures" (4.535).

The abbreviation of intimacy that takes place in Book 4 also occurs in other sections of the epic. The opening moments of Raphael's visit to Eden, for example, are highly suggestive. As Turner points out, Raphael's visit is sexualized from the very beginning:

His arrival in Eden is heralded by an astonishing burst of sensuous imagery, a "pouring forth" of "enormous bliss" in the landscape. He arrives, on the stroke of noon, just as "the mounted Sun / Shot down direct his fervid Raies to warm / Earths inmost womb." Raphael's entrance is thus charged with sexual energy. (270)

The erotic nature of the visit is developed even further by the narrator's rapturous disquisitions on Eve's naked ministrations. The sexual arousal inspired by these erotic moments, however, is denied by the declaration that "in those hearts / Love unlibidinous reign'd" (5.448–49). The qualification once again alerts the reader to the dangers of construing Edenic sociality in a sinfully sexual manner. Indubitably excluding from Eden a lustful sexuality, the epic quite possibly excludes from Eden all sexuality.

Genital intimacy is subtly denied yet again when Eve absents herself from Adam and Raphael's conversation, desiring to hear the angel's message from Adam, for

"hee, she knew would intermix / Grateful digressions, and solve high dispute / With conjugal Caresses, from his Lip / Not Words alone pleas'd her" (8.54–57). Invoking the concept of conjugality, the passage suggests a sexuality and then quickly suppresses that understanding, limiting to the lip the pleasure of the caresses. Locating "conjugal Caresses" in the oral region, the text restricts the caress to that region, implicitly asserting that Adam and Eve's physical intimacy does not include more than kissing.

Nevertheless, the chasteness of innocent kisses does not reign long; the next lines unleash the temporarily curtailed eroticism. As the narrator remarks, Eve does not leave unnoticed:

With Goddess-like demeanour forth she went;
Not unattended, for on her Graces waited still,
And from about her shot Darts of desire
Into all Eyes to wish her still in sight.
(8.59–63)

The desire that Eve inspires, deriving from the "sight" of her naked body, defines desire in bodily dimensions. It is Eve's naked body to which Adam and Raphael react, suggesting that corporeal sexuality is somehow involved in both human and angelic appetite. Given the intensity of Adam and Raphael's scopic reaction to Eve's unveiled physical form, it is not surprising that a sizeable segment of their subsequent discussion revolves around the emotional and bodily manifestations of love.

Recounting for Raphael the events of his first day in Eden, Adam suggests that he was concerned with sexuality almost from his inception; his petition for a companion is informed by a sexual understanding. Arguing that God has not the need that he does for a companion, Adam declares: "No need that thou / Shouldst propagate, already infinite" (8.419–20). Adam's increase, on the other hand, depends upon a partner. In order to "beget / Like of his like, his Image multipl'd," Adam requires one with whom he can enjoy "Collateral love" (8.422–26). The references to propagating and begetting prove that Adam's desire for companionship includes sexual as well as social components. Nevertheless, the sexual considerations that culminate in Eve's creation do not definitively establish a pre-lapsarian sexuality. Eve was formed with the potential to mate with Adam, but that potential need not be realized until after the Fall. In this case, the fact that God forms Eve to accommodate sexual union may be nothing more than a manifestation of his providence: he allows for the union that he knows will eventually take place. The fact that Eve

was made "to consummate all" does not necessarily indicate that this consummation takes place prior to the Fall (8.556).

But Adam's narration of the nuptial night suggests that it does. When Eve is first presented to her husband, Adam indicates that she shies away from him as a result of her "Innocence and Virgin Modestie" (8.501). In other words, Eve immediately recognizes that her interaction with Adam will imminently endanger her virginity. As Adam leads Eve to "the Nuptial Bowre," floral images reinforce the idea that Eve is at this moment surrendering her virginity. Line 517 observes that the bushes around the bower "flung Rose," offering up or surrendering the conventional symbol of virginity in the same way that Eve offers her actual virginity. Eve's blush ("I led her blushing like the Morn" [8.511]) also suggests a sexual encounter, the rising of blood in the face euphemistically pointing to the increased flow of blood in the sexual organs that accompanies arousal. Adam confirms that the intimacy of the marriage night is bodily as well as spiritual when he concludes that the enjoyment he possesses with Eve is unlike the other "delicacies" offered in the Garden. Explaining that Eden's "Herbs, Fruits, and Flours, / Walks, and the melodie of Birds" please the senses of "Taste, Sight, Smell," Adam commits an important omission, for none of these pleasures involve the sense of touch. The sense of touch, Adam notes, is engaged exclusively in his interaction with Eve: "But here / Farr otherwise, transported I behold, / Transported touch" (8.527–30). The sexual nature of the type of touching Adam associates with Eve is suggested by the equation of sex and touch that is performed in Raphael's later description of sex as "the sense of touch whereby mankind / Is propagated" (8.579).

Raphael's reaction to Adam's nuptial narration—like that of most Miltonists—assumes a sexual consummation. He cautions against overvaluing sexual enjoyment, reminding Adam that:

the same [is] voutsaf't
To Cattel and each Beast; which would not be
To them made common and divulg'd, if aught
Therein enjoy'd were worthy to subdue
The Soule of Man.
(8.581–85)

Adam's rebuttal of this reprimand seems to authorize the assumption that Adam has experienced sex. He carefully notes:

Neither her out-side formd so fair, nor aught
 In procreation common to all kindes
 (Though higher of the genial Bed by far,
 And with mysterious reverence I deem)
 So much delights me as those graceful acts,
 Those thousand decencies that daily flow
 From all her words and actions mixt with Love
 And sweet compliance. (8.596–603)

Comparing and subordinating the actions of procreation to the “thousand decencies” of daily life with Eve, Adam implicitly attests to the fact that he has felt procreative pleasure. If Adam were still ignorant of the joys of sexual intimacy, he would not be able to evaluate the intensity of that pleasure in relation to the enjoyment derived from Eve’s other “graceful acts.” Because Adam can and does perform this comparative operation, we have reason to confide in Adam and Eve’s pre-lapsarian sexuality.

But we also have cause for caution. Adam concludes this discussion of what seems to be explicit Edenic sexuality with the declaration: “Thus I have told thee all my State, and brought / My Storie to the sum of earthly bliss / Which I enjoy” (8.521–23). If Adam has indeed been talking about sexuality, then the poem at this point proclaims sex to be the quintessence of Edenic happiness. Such a stance, however, is strikingly at odds with Milton’s earlier evaluation of the sexual relation. To be sure, Adam’s statement refers to pre-lapsarian sexuality, and Milton’s other writings concern themselves with post-lapsarian sexuality, but this difference alone is perhaps inadequate to explain the extreme disjunction between Adam’s praise of sex and Milton’s earlier vilification. In *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, for example, sex is not sublime but scatological. Identifying semen as “the quintessence of an excrement,” Milton identifies sex with such mundane bodily processes as perspiration and defecation (2.248).¹² The denigration of sex that takes place in the divorce tracts leads to the description of sexual desire as “a sublunary and bestial burning,” “the sting of a brute desire,” and “a carnal rage” (2.269, 339, 355). The act that slakes this brutish appetite is identified as “the prescrib’d satisfaction of an irrational heat” and nothing more than the “draining” of the aforementioned “carnal rage” (2.249, 355). Although the divorce tracts are temporally and emotionally removed from *Paradise Lost*, Raphael’s rhetoric suggests that these divorce tract descriptions of sex are still operative. Repeatedly associating sexuality with bestiality, the angel informs Adam that overestimation of conjugal intimacy constitutes being “sunk in carnal pleasure” (8.593). The narrator also invokes the divorce

tract opinion regarding sexuality, praising marriage for driving “adulterous lust . . . from men / Among the bestial herds to raunge” (4.753–54). If sex in *Paradise Lost* continues to be for Milton an essentially animalistic act, it is possible that we are mistaken in our belief that Adam’s nuptial narration is about sex. Even if Milton’s own experience of conjugal intimacy has altered significantly between the divorce tracts and the epic, it is at least a little unlikely that what was once a the “draining of a carnal rage” could be redeemed so completely as to come full circle and constitute “the sum of earthly bliss.”

If we concede that pre-lapsarian sex is so pure as to bear absolutely no relation to the brutish congress of the divorce tracts, we might still, however, question whether sexual intimacy could plausibly become the pinnacle of pre-lapsarian pleasure, for this would require Milton to contradict in *Paradise Lost* not only his divorce tract descriptions of sex but also the entire understanding of marriage outlined in those texts. In these prose tracts, Milton consistently claims that the purpose of marriage is to provide “society.” This society may take many forms: the three primary being “religious,” “civill,” and “corporal” (2.269). Although each of these forms of society is important in its own right, Milton asserts a rigid hierarchy among them. Religious society is in all cases valued above civil, which is in all cases valued above corporal. In *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, for instance, Milton describes the correct evaluation of the various forms of marital interaction in this fashion: “Among Christian Writers touching matrimony, there be three chief ends therof agreed on; Godly society, next civill, and thirdly, that of the marriage bed. Of these the first in name to be the highest and most excellent, no baptiz’d man can deny” (2.268–69). If Adam’s description of his marriage night concerns itself with corporal union, then his assertion that such union is the sum of earthly bliss inverts Milton’s explicit matrimonial value structure. It is implausible that Milton could perform such an inversion, regardless of what might have happened in his private life during the years between the divorce tracts and *Paradise Lost*; his divorce tract criticism of those who suggest sex to be the pinnacle of marital pleasure leaves absolutely no room for Milton to later embrace such an idea. In *Doctrine and Discipline* Milton claims that the individual who “affirms the bed to be the highest of marriage” is possessed of “a grosse and borish opinion . . . as far from the countenance of Scripture, as from the light of all clean philosophy, or civill nature” (2.269). It is improbable that Milton could so completely reverse his thinking as to endorse a position as “far from the countenance of Scripture” as Adam’s seeming praise of sex.

Some might attempt to resolve this problem by pointing out that Milton himself does not make the enthusiastic claim in question. Adam is the one who praises sex as the perfection of earthly bliss, and—as we have seen—Adam’s innocent perfection does not necessarily disallow error or mistake. Given Milton’s vigorous and vitriolic opposition to the overvaluation of sex, it is difficult to believe that Milton could conceive of Adam’s alleged ideas of sex as venial error or mere misjudgment. Opposed in Milton’s mind to both scriptural knowledge and rational intelligence, Adam’s alleged celebration of sexuality would border on sinfulness. Moreover, Adam’s purported praise of sex allies him with Milton’s bitterest enemies; it is hard to accept that Milton would have chosen such a subjective position for the hero of his life’s work. The improbability that an unfallen Adam would reverse Milton’s explicit understanding of marital ideology requires that we at least acknowledge that sex might not be at the center of Adam’s account of the marriage night.

Additionally, the fact that Raphael interprets Adam’s narration as evidence of sexual consummation need not require that we read the passage in that fashion. The fact that Raphael sexualizes the nuptial night scene might in fact undermine that very reading, for numerous scholars have persuasively pointed out that Raphael is quite possibly wrong on a number of points. His performance of the task given him by God is fraught with what might correctly be called mistakes, and none of these mistakes is more glaring than the mistakes made when addressing Adam and Eve’s intimate life. The egregiousness of Raphael’s errors in the area of human sexuality is such that even his staunchest supporters feel compelled to acknowledge them. Thomas Copeland, for instance, attempts to defend Raphael from his detractors, arguing that “the affable archangel may be Milton’s most credible, because most nearly three-dimensional, portrait of goodness. . . . He is truly a humble and loving individual whom Milton employs not only to describe but to exemplify the nature of virtue” (117). In an effort to exculpate Raphael of the charge that he has botched his divinely enjoined job, Copeland gives a detailed analysis of the angel’s actions, carefully noting at each point that Raphael is “eminently suited . . . to his role” and fulfills it admirably (121). The exoneration ends, however, when we reach the angel’s interpretation of the nuptial night narration. Conscientiously identifying instances where Raphael might misunderstand Adam’s meaning, Copeland confesses that the angel’s reaction to the marriage night story is “his only failure” (125). In Copeland’s reading, Raphael is guilty of performing an “oversimplification of a complex problem”

(125). The angel errs because he “fail[s] to discriminate between the quality of Adam and Eve’s embraces and the rutting of animals” (125–26). I suggest that Raphael’s error might entail not only mistaking the nature of Adam and Eve’s physical intimacy but also mistaking the extent of Adam and Eve’s physical intimacy. The angel seems to think that Adam and Eve have sex and that Adam is referring to this sexual relation when he talks of being transported. If even the angel’s apologists acknowledge that he misconstrues Adam’s meaning in this matter, however, the fact that Raphael understands Adam to be talking about Edenic copulation need not indicate that this is actually the case. In short, Raphael is not an irrefutable witness to pre-lapsarian conjugality.

Although Raphael’s credibility is compromised to the point that we might cautiously question his conclusions about sexuality in the Garden, the authority of the epic narrator is not. And the epic narrator seems to ratify Raphael’s surmises, presenting in the bower scene of Book 4 what appears to be a detailed account of Edenic sexuality. Having briefly examined this account earlier in the essay, we now return for a closer look.

As Adam and Eve retire to their bower, stars appear in the sky. The brightest star is the evening star, associated with Venus and later identified as “Loves Harbinger” (11.589). The pre-eminence of the star of Venus/Love suggests that a sexual expression of love is about to occur. It is perhaps significant, however, that the goddess of Love does not continue to be the brightest source of celestial light. The evening star merely:

rode brightest, till the Moon
Rising in clouded Majestie, at length
Apparent Queen unvaild her peerless light,
And o’re the dark her Silver Mantle threw.
(4.606–609)

Venus, the goddess of love, is supplanted by Diana, the goddess of chastity. (The moon’s significance as a symbol of virginity is subtly suggested by its “clouded Majestie” which anticipates the later phrase “Virgin Majestie” [9.270]). As Chastity overpowers Love, Eden’s astronomy appears to deny that Adam and Eve make love on this evening.

On the other hand, the fact that Love is replaced by Chastity only after Love has enjoyed a temporary time of dominance might be read as one more assertion of Edenic sexuality. Love rules “at length” and is displaced only after this period of rule. The reign of Venus in the realm of Diana could suggest that Eve temporarily

surrenders virginity in favor of love. The fact that Venus's reign is short-lived is in this reading not a denial of sexuality but rather an assertion that such sexuality is blameless. Pre-lapsarian lovemaking temporarily dethrones Diana but does not ultimately deprive her of sovereignty. As the Moon returns to the heavens after Love's brief ascension, purity returns to Eve after making love with her husband.

As the narration of that night focuses on the bower, erotic expectancy intensifies. Framed by God for "man's delightful use," the bower is reported to be more secluded and private than any bower before utilized by the hypersexualized satyrs of ancient myth (4.690–92, 705–706). Describing the sanctum, the narrator tells us that it is:

Here in close recess
With Flowers, Garlands, and sweet-smelling Herbs
[That] Espoused *Eve* decks first her nuptial Bed,
And heav'nly Quires the Hymenæan sung,
What day the genial Angel to our Sire
Brought her in naked beauty. (4.708–13)

The proximity in these lines of nakedness to nuptial beds produces a premonition of sexuality, as does the allusion to the god of marriage whose name doubles as the term for the precise anatomical part that is allegedly ruptured in a woman's first act of intercourse.

This sexual suggestiveness culminates in the conjectured consummation of "the Rites / Mysterious of connubial Love" (4.742–43). A sexual reading of these rites is reinforced by an examination of the way Milton uses the word "mysterious." Milton first employs the term in the description of Adam and Eve's nakedness, using "mysterious" to refer to the genitals: "Nor those mysterious parts were then conceal'd, / Then was not guiltie shame, dishonest shame" (4.312–13). The word's subsequent applications suggest that the connection between the sexual organs and the word "mysterious" is not inconsequential. Quite the contrary, it seems that Milton uses "mysterious" as an idiosyncratic yet precise euphemism for the genital region. Used only four other times in the whole of *Paradise Lost*, "mysterious" appears almost exclusively in relation to marital intimacy and sexual reproduction.¹³ In addition to "the Rites / Mysterious of connubial love," Milton enlists the term in a later discussion of "wedded Love, mysterious Law, true source / Of human offspring" (4.750–51). Adam's debate with Raphael about "the sense of touch whereby mankind / Is propagated" also utilizes the term, for Adam tells the angel:

Neither [Eve's] out-side form'd so fair, nor aught
In procreation common to all kindes

(Though higher of the genial Bed by far,
And with mysterious reverence I deem)
So much delights me as those graceful acts,
Those thousand decencies that daily flow,
From all her words and actions. (8.579–80, 596–602)

Milton's consistent use of "mysterious" in connection with the sexual zones and the sexual act legitimizes a genitally specific reading of the "Rites / Mysterious of connubial Love."

Immediately following this passage, the narrator expounds upon marriage and love in a lengthy diatribe against austere Hypocrites who "defam[e] as impure what God declares / Pure" (4.746–47). It becomes clear that the defense deals with the sexual relation as the narrator speaks of the "true source / Of human offspring" and declares: "Our Maker bids increase, who bids abstain / But our destroyer, foe to God and Man?" (4.748–51). Believing the passage to be a gloss on the actions of Adam and Eve, traditional readings have retroactively applied the sexual explicitness of the praise of wedded love to the bower in the Garden of Eden. Because the passage that follows the bower scene addresses sexual activity, the bower scene must also include sexual activity. This interpretation is certainly viable, but it is also possible that the sexual pronouncements of the diatribe do not intend to disclose or clarify the actions of the bower. Lindenbaum, for instance, recognizes that the passage is not directly related to the bower scene:

Everything from the reference to hypocrites up to the description of the nightingales is, as eighteenth-century critics and editors such as Addison and Bishop Thomas Newton were wont to observe, very strictly speaking a digression from the straight narrative progress of the poem . . . By the time he is distinguishing postlapsarian wedded love from prostitution, "Court Amours," and Petrarchan love, this narrator has wandered well away from the ostensible main subject of this part of Book IV—Adam and Eve in Paradise. (285–86)

The temporal referents of this passage—obviously anachronistic in Eden—also indicate that the praise of wedded love, digressing from pre-lapsarian Paradise, is divorced from pre-Fall contexts. Allusions to masked balls, courtly conventions, and harlotry clearly have no place in the Garden, yet we have insisted that the sexuality associated with those balls, courts, and harlots does. These Edenic anachronisms should perhaps

undermine the retroactive reading strategy that sees the sexuality of the encomium as evidence of sexuality in Eden. Disconnected from the occasion that inspired it (Adam and Eve's bower), the passage praising marital sexuality has only a tenuous relationship to the activities of the bower and should not be construed as proof that Adam and Eve have sex prior to the Fall.

Of course, even if the praise of post-lapsarian conjugality contained in the encomium is causally connected to Adam and Eve's actions in the bower, we end up right back where we started: with the inexorable "I weene." Reducing everything that follows to unsubstantiated speculation, the "I weene" forever frustrates our desire to determine precisely what goes on in the Garden. Did they or didn't they? Ultimately, we are left to "weene" for ourselves.

Edward Phillips claims that Milton originally intended to relate the Genesis story in a tragedy rather than an epic (26). The Trinity Manuscript seems to support this claim, containing four drafts of an outline for a tragedy called *Paradise Lost*. These outlines indicate that Adam and Eve's marriage and nuptial night would have been detailed in the second act of the tragedy. Adam and Eve would not have appeared in this act; however, Moses would simply have described the events for the audience. Turner claims that this substitution was deemed necessary because Milton could not decide how to present Edenic sexuality to an audience whose perceptual faculties were corrupted by sin. In Turner's view, the tragedy remained unwritten because the idea of portraying innocent eroticism created for Milton an insurmountable "crisis of representation" (247).¹⁴ According to Turner, however, the crisis that frustrated Milton's attempt at tragedy does not affect the epic: "This crisis of representation . . . is suspended in *Paradise Lost*, where images from the wedding-ceremony are diffused throughout the idyllic books, extending rather than harshly truncating the sense of consummated happiness" (247). I hope to have shown that the suspension of this "crisis of representation" is not as complete as Turner would have us believe. Indeed, *Paradise Lost* employs the very tactics of evasion and non-representation that Turner identifies with the unwritten tragedy. Although there are numerous moments that suggest Adam and Eve enjoy a pre-lapsarian sexuality, each of these moments is tempered to some degree by inconclusiveness and ambiguity. Veiling eroticism in indeterminacy, *Paradise Lost* is suggestive, but not sexually explicit.

We have perhaps failed to fully acknowledge the ambiguity underlying Milton's treatment of pre-lapsarian sexuality because on other occasions and other issues he

resoundingly rejects equivocation. In Book 5, for instance, Milton scorns those who refuse to be forthright about the question of angelic ingestion. Whereas timid theologians skirt the question, Milton brazenly asserts that angels do, in fact eat. Not only do they have the ability to eat—they have a need to do so. As Raphael tells Adam:

Food alike those pure
Intelligential substances require
As doth your Rational; and both contain
Within them every lower facultie
Of sense, whereby they hear, see, smell, touch, taste,
Tasting concoct, digest, assimilate,
And corporeal to incorporeal turn.
For know, whatever was created, needs
To be sustained and fed. (5.407–415)

Lest we mistake the directness of the angel's remarks, Milton makes himself absolutely clear:

So down they sat,
And to their viands fell, nor seemingly
The Angel, nor in mist, the common gloss
Of Theologians, but with keen dispatch
Of real hunger, and concovective heate
To transubstantiate. (5.433–438).

Rejecting obfuscation, Milton unequivocally declares that angels eat.

On the question of pre-lapsarian sexuality, however, Milton does an about-face, implementing the precise strategies of ambiguity and concealment that he disdains in Book 5 as "the common gloss/ Of Theologians" (5.435–436). Milton's "nor turnd I weene" is the exact equivalent of the "seemingly" that contemptible authors use to avoid difficult declarations. Given the fact that Milton's treatment of pre-lapsarian sexuality includes him in the class of theologians that he execrates, the more compelling question concerning Adam and Eve's pre-lapsarian sexuality is not whether we are justified in thinking that Adam and Eve have sex in the Garden but why it is impossible for us to ever know for sure. Rather than wrangle over possibly erotic episodes, perhaps we should shift our focus, questioning why Milton consistently cavils when he could easily convince. At every point where certainty could be established—sometimes with as little effort as a single word—Milton backpedals, leaving us nothing more than speculation.

Although she does not address Adam and Eve's Edenic sexuality, Virginia Mollenkott points to other

matters in which Milton appears to carefully incorporate uncertainty into the epic, including the identity of the earth's creator and the member of the godhead who will eventually judge our actions. Mollenkott believes Milton to be using in these instances "the technique of multiple choice." According to Mollenkott, Milton resorts to this technique in order "to avoid committing himself to a theological doctrine or detail for which he could find no concrete support in the Bible" (102–103). Fascinated with difficult theological issues, Milton could not avoid raising thorny questions but could also not risk answering them: "His restless, curious mind could not resist asking the questions, but his loyalty to scriptural revelation limited the range of possible speculation. Multiple choice, by which he only mused aloud but did not commit himself to a single answer, provided the necessary safety valve" (105). In Mollenkott's view, Milton at these moments presents the reader with "deliberate multiple choices . . . in such a way as to preserve biblical ambiguity without challenging biblical precision" (104).

Mollenkott's thesis could certainly account for the ambiguity surrounding Adam and Eve's intimacy in Eden. In fact, Milton seems possessed of just such a zeal for biblical precision in the *Christian Doctrine*, proclaiming in the chapter called "Of the Holy Scripture":

No inferences should be made from the text, unless they follow necessarily from what is written. This precaution is necessary, otherwise we may be forced to believe something which is not written instead of something which is, and to accept human reasoning, generally fallacious, instead of divine doctrine, thus mistaking the shadow for the substance. (6.583)

As the chapter continues, however, Milton becomes less absolute, eventually assuming a position on scriptural interpretation that provides ample opportunity for inference. The turn from literalism begins with the recognition that "not all the instructions which the apostles gave the churches were written down, or if they were written down they have not survived" (6.586). Although Milton is confident that these instructions were "not necessary for salvation," he suspects that they might be "useful" and therefore concludes that "they ought, then, to be supplied either from other passages of scripture or, if it is doubtful whether this is possible . . . from that same Spirit operating in us through faith and charity" (6.586). Milton justifies this supplementation of scripture by relating the actions of Paul: "So when the Corinthians asked Paul about certain matters on which scripture had not laid

down anything definite, he answered them in accordance with the spirit of Christianity, and by means of that spiritual anointment which he had received . . . Thus he reminds them that they are able to supply answers for themselves in questions of this kind" (6.586–87). Moreover, Milton not only allows for supplementation because of scriptural omission; he claims that supplementation is also necessary because of scriptural corruption. According to Milton: "The external scripture, particularly the New Testament, has often been liable to corruption and is, in fact, corrupt" (6.589). God has allowed this corruption in order to "convince us that the Spirit which is given to us is a more certain guide than scripture, and that we ought to follow it" (6.589). Milton's teachings on scripture, then, not only allow for supplementation of scriptural texts but in certain circumstances encourage it as God's intent. Biblical silence on pre-lapsarian sexuality does not present for Milton an insurmountable obstacle.

Even if Milton were to believe that Edenic sexual relations are not an instance where we "are able to supply answers for [our]selves," it is unlikely that Milton would be unable to establish pre-lapsarian sexuality using "external scripture" alone. Milton's exegetical inventiveness, after all, has no trouble taking scriptures regarding divorce and transforming them from prohibition into permission. As Stanley Fish explains, Milton's rhetorical skill in the *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* enables him to fit texts into "an interpretation so strenuous that even the word 'manipulation' is too mild to describe it" (54). By the end of the tract, Fish observes, the Bible is an almost perfectly malleable text. Milton is able to make the Bible say just about anything: "In the *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* the unwritten controls the written to the extent of rewriting it whenever its apparent sense is inconvenient" (58). In short, Mollenkott's suggestion that Milton maintains erotic ambiguity in Eden in order to preserve biblical precision is perhaps unsatisfactory because it slights Milton's exegetical inventiveness and enslaves him to the "obstinate *literality*" and "*alphabetical servility*" that he elsewhere casts off (2.279–80).

Mollenkott, however, does not believe that every instance of ambiguity is an attempt to avoid contradicting or surpassing the Bible. She suggests that Milton also uses the strategy of multiple choice "as a way of expressing respect for the *mysteries* of the Creator and his creation" (105). Offering the reader a number of possible solutions, Milton emphasizes the richness and complexity of God's universe, wherein any or all of those possible solutions might pertain. The prominence of the

word “mysterious” in sexual contexts indicates that Milton’s ambiguity in *Paradise Lost* might aim at just such an end. By veiling Adam and Eve’s intimacy in uncertainty, Milton might be attempting to mystify the marital and sexual relationships. Transformed into a divine enigma, the union between husband and wife would become a godly mystery, beautiful beyond human understanding.

If Milton is indeed trying in *Paradise Lost* to turn sex and marriage into godly mysteries, then this project contradicts his earlier works, which seek to anatomize and explicate sexual and marital relationships—including Adam and Eve’s—in unflinching detail. Milton’s exhaustive examination of both pre- and post-lapsarian wedded bliss in the divorce tracts does not give any indication that sex and marriage are so sublime that they should be shrouded in ineffability. Quite the contrary, the success of the divorce tracts depends upon the human capacity (specifically, Milton’s capacity) to understand the institution and practices of marriage. The thorough manner with which Milton dissects the scriptures and ideologies surrounding sex and marriage suggests that these subjects do not constitute a mystery for Milton.

I believe that we can more fully account for Milton’s reticence in regard to pre-lapsarian lovemaking by examining the nature of the pre-lapsarian world. Milton’s sexual ambiguity is not a result of theological timidity, an acquiescence to biblical omission, or a desire to transform sexuality into a mystery of God. Rather, Milton’s equivocation derives from his theological understanding of the human condition prior to the Fall. In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve are entirely whole, possessing perfect integrity of self. They experience no sense of division, whether within themselves or between themselves. It is for this reason that Milton can and does use singular pronouns to refer to the pair. Adam and Eve’s total unity disallows any type of plurality or division. It also disallows any type of sexual specificity, for sexual specificity is predicated upon fragmentation and division. In order to explicitly endow Adam and Eve with a genital sexuality in Eden, Milton would have to divide Adam and Eve into discrete bodily regions and then acknowledge those divisions by explaining which particular regions do and do not enter into contact with one another in the course of Adam and Eve’s conjugal converse. But the unfallen individual cannot be fragmented in this fashion, as Adam and Eve’s experience of themselves evidences. Adam and Eve’s pre-lapsarian bodies are seamless; no “part” (the word already undermines the idea) is more prominent or more visible than any other. It is only after the Fall that

they begin to anatomize themselves, discovering and then covering certain areas that have come into existence as a result of sin (i.e., have entered Adam and Eve’s awareness as a “part” of their previously unfragmented whole). Sex cannot be specified in the Garden because the fallen anatomical model upon which a concept such as sex depends does not pertain.

In the same way that Adam and Eve’s “bodily” integrity disallows a delineation of sexuality, their “spiritual” integrity also undermines such an idea. In their Edenic existence, Adam and Eve recognize no difference between their “spirit” and their “body.” Since all of Adam and Eve’s desires aim in only one direction—obedience—no self-division is present or perceptible. In a fallen world, Paul is to teach: “The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would” (Gal. 5:17). He confesses that he himself is a victim of this self-division: “That which I do I allow not: for what I would, that I do not; but what I hate, that do I” (Rom. 7:15). In their unfallen world, on the other hand, Adam and Eve are completely unaware of this sense of self-division. They can recognize no plurality of “wills” because the internecine conflict that fragments the will in this fashion has not yet come into being. For this reason, sexual intercourse in the pre-lapsarian condition cannot be recognized as such, for intercourse becomes recognizable as sexual, social, and political only after the singular human self is fragmented into the sexual, the social, and/or the political agent. Specifying intercourse as “sexual” implicitly excludes other forms of intercourse, yet Adam and Eve’s singular unity is such that no type of intercourse can be excluded. Adam and Eve’s intercourse can be reduced to a single form of converse—sexual or otherwise—only after the Fall when their primary unity is shattered by sin and they can engage in an intercourse that is not total but merely sexual.

It is at this point that angelic embraces become important. In his question to Raphael about divine lovemaking, Adam asks Raphael to specify the type of touching in which angels engage: “Do they mix / Irradiance, virtual, or immediate touch?” (8.616–17). In this respect, Adam puts to the angel the exact question we put to Milton: what degree of intimacy exists in the sinless relationship?¹⁵ Raphael’s answer is instructive, for the angel refuses to take up the proposed terminology of specificity. Rather, Raphael merely tells Adam that if angels embrace, they embrace totally: “Easier than Air with Air, if Spirits embrace, / Total they mix, Union of Pure with Pure / Desiring” (8.626–28). In his reply, Raphael is not

beating around the bush. He is telling all that he can tell. The angel cannot descend to any level of detail lower than "total" because there exists no lower level of subjective existence. Angels are indivisible, unfragmented, all-of-one-piece. There can be no specification beyond "total" because "total" is all there is.

In this way, Milton's treatment of Adam and Eve's prelapsarian sexuality is identical to Raphael's description of angelic intimacy. Before the Fall, Adam and Eve possess complete integrity of self. Their union, like that of the angels, is that of "Pure with Pure." Unable to hold back or reserve from their partner a "part" of themselves, Adam and Eve mix totally. Nevertheless, the sexual or genital component of this mixing, like any other component, can never be explicitly recognized in the text, for such a recognition would require the imposition of a fallen and fragmented subjective framework onto an unfallen and entirely unified world. Too rigorous a theologian to commit such an error, Milton deliberately equivocates on the issue of Edenic intimacy. He carefully refuses to specify the precise nature of Adam and Eve's conjugal society because such specification constitutes a denial of the prelapsarian condition that his imaginative art seeks to recapture. Milton frustrates our desire to find irrefutable sexuality in the Edenic relationship because the presence of such indubitable evidence would degrade the prelapsarian integrity of Adam and Eve out of which their very acts of intimacy arise.

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NOTES

¹ In the penultimate chapter of *Milton and Sex*, Edward LeComte also looks at Adam and Eve's sexual life. LeComte, however, explicitly eschews the expert or specialized reader in favor of "the non-specialist who knows little of, or is rusty on, Milton" (ix). In order to interest this general readership, LeComte chooses to forego the stringent type of scrutiny performed by Lindenbaum and Turner. Because LeComte's work is self-avowedly "a survey" seeking only "to present interesting possibilities," I focus in this essay on the work of Lindenbaum and Turner, merely referring the reader to LeComte (x). His thoughts on prelapsarian sexuality can be found in *Milton and Sex* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 88–100.

² All references to Milton's poetry are from *The Riverside Milton*, ed. Roy Flannagan (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998).

³ In his footnote to 9.208 Flannagan claims that St. Augustine raises similar objections in *The City of God*. I address Defoe's remarks rather than Augustine's because Defoe concerns himself specifically with prelapsarian sex in *Paradise Lost* and because Defoe's brevity better suits the spatial considerations of this essay.

⁴ Lewalski's discussion grows out of the work of Ruth Mohl, who first alerted Miltonists to the complexity of the category "perfection," pointing out the myriad of meanings the term connotes in classical, Christian, and Miltonic contexts. Numerous critics have made use of Mohl's observations, including Evans (242–71), Diekhoff, Blackburn, and Musacchio. Lindenbaum recognizes this body of scholarship in his own essay but does not envision its relation to Defoe's position.

⁵ This is the single point on which Lindenbaum engages Defoe. Suggesting that early modern society might have recognized reasons for sex other than reproduction, Lindenbaum cites the *Book of Common Prayer*, which identifies as three purposes of marriage: (1) procreation, (2) alleviation of lust/prevention of fornication, and (3) mutual society, help, and comfort. According to Lindenbaum, "Puritan preachers in the seventeenth century were to give greater and greater emphasis in their discussions on marriage to the end listed third in the prayer book and thus to suggest that mutual help or companionship was the most important of the three ends." Lindenbaum's response to Defoe is unsatisfying, however, because the material he cites addresses the *marital* relation rather than the *sexual* relation. The two are not identical. Furthermore, Lindenbaum seeks to establish Milton's position on sex and marriage by referring to Anglican and Puritan positions on sex and marriage—even though Lindenbaum contends throughout his essay that Milton's unique position has no relation to the individuals and institutions of his time. Lastly, Lindenbaum's understanding of the role of religiously-sanctioned eroticism in Milton's time is suspect. Although Lindenbaum claims that "there was little writing before or even after Milton explicitly extolling the sexual act merely as an expression of love" (302, n.1), Turner describes an early modern revision of sexual and marital ideology that allows for extensive erotic freedom (79–92). Nevertheless, the primary concern in

understanding *Paradise Lost* is not whether others conceive of sex apart from reproduction but whether Milton does.

⁶ Contending as I am that we have been wrong to endorse so confidently the position that Adam and Eve have sex in Milton's Eden, I must recognize that angelic sexuality is also ambiguous. Raphael's answer is evasive, failing to address the specificity of Adam's question about different kinds of "mixing." Additionally, Raphael does not say that Spirits mix easier than air with air *when* they embrace but rather *if* they embrace (8.626). I will address this equivocation later in the essay but at this point accept with some reservation the prevailing critical opinion that Milton's angels participate in sexual embraces.

⁷ The sole exception is Satan, who fathers both Sin and Death. For a number of reasons, however, I reject the idea that Satan's propagative ability shows that angels can reproduce and that angelic copulation is thereby legitimized by procreative intentions. First, Sin is not the product of sexual coupling, but rather is born asexually. Second, Satan's progeny is allegorical in nature, diminishing the significance that his paternity might have on the larger issue of whether angels literally engender offspring. Third, Satan's acts of reproduction astound the other angels—"amazement seis'd / All th' Host of Heav'n" (2.758–59)—suggesting that they are utterly unaccustomed to angelic regeneration. To the contrary, the angels' reaction affirms that Satan's act is a deviation from and distortion of the unfallen existence of angels. In sum, the fact that a single fallen angel is able to sire allegorical offspring cannot be taken as proof that unfallen angels possess a similar ability. Even if unfallen angels share with Satan the ability to procreate, this reproductive potential does not undo my contention that angelic sex establishes the legitimacy of sex as an expression of love. Indeed, such a position entrenches my reading even more firmly, for such a scenario endorses a heavenly division of sex and reproduction. If angels can reproduce as Satan can (i.e., asexually), they can have no procreative justification for their unions with other angels. Unsupported by reproductive concerns, angelic sex is nothing other than an expression of love.

⁸ Milton also collapses the distinction between woman and flower in 4.270–71, describing the flower-gathering Proserpine as "Her self a fairer Floure" gathered by "gloomie *Dis*." Referring to women generally and Eve particularly as plants, Milton gestures toward theological traditions identifying Eve with the forbidden fruit of

Eden. In this exegetical outlook, Adam sins not by tasting an actual fruit but rather by tasting (carnally) his consort. The underlying idea—that Eve is coextensive with and indistinguishable from Eden's flora—is a more emphatic version of Milton's suggestion that Eve's identity is bound up with Eden's flowers.

⁹ Augustine, however, claims that this desire for isolation is a result of the Fall. We hide our sexual behavior out of embarrassment at our sin-bred inability to control our genital responses—a lack of control which, according to Augustine, would not have affected unfallen Adam and Eve.

¹⁰ Our enthusiasm in accepting this information, however, should be tempered by the fact that Satan is the one who provides it.

¹¹ Related to the roses in the bower, the "*May* flowers" that are "shed" in this account uphold the more overtly sexual meanings of the metaphor by suggesting that Eve's virginity is a flower that is plucked, or shed.

¹² All citations of Milton's prose are from the *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, Ed. Don M. Wolfe, et al. 8 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953–82).

¹³ The sole exception is 10.173.

¹⁴ Turner's reading of the projected tragedy is perhaps inaccurate. Adam and Eve are withheld from sight in the second act of the play—but they are similarly withheld in the first and third acts, only appearing in the fourth act after they have eaten the forbidden fruit. The fact that the audience is prevented from seeing *any* part of their pre-lapsarian life—sexual or otherwise—suggests that Adam and Eve's invisibility arises not so much from the difficulty of presenting Edenic sexuality in particular but rather Edenic existence in general.

¹⁵ Adam's ability to frame the question in these terms does not contradict my claim that he and Eve have no experiential knowledge of self-division. Adam has earlier shown an ability to discuss topics about which he is ignorant. In 4.425, for instance, Adam notes with approval the proximity of the Tree of Death to the Tree of Life even though he has no understanding of Death's meaning: "So Neer grows Death to Life, what ere Death is, / Some dreadful thing no doubt." In another instance, Adam proclaims when Eve is brought to him that Man

for cause of Woman "shall forgoe / Father and Mother, and to his Wife adhere"—even though these familial roles (especially that of "mother") are utterly unavailable to him (8.497–98).

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