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# Queer 'Paradise Lost': Reproduction, Gender, and Sexuality

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**QUEER *PARADISE LOST*: REPRODUCTION, GENDER, AND SEXUALITY**

by

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**SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
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### Abstract

In the span of this thesis, I investigate the queer nature of John Milton's epic poem *Paradise Lost*, and argue that in spite of the biblical subject matter it is in fact a text filled with instances of queer transgression. I focus on preexisting feminist critiques of Milton in my introduction in order to ground myself within the academic field, and in order to illustrate how I will be branching out from it. In my first chapter, I discuss the queered nature of the poem's landscapes, such as Chaos and Hell, and the specifically queer and masculine nature of reproduction, such as Sin's birth out of Satan's head and Eve's birth from Adam's rib. I then turn to an in-depth discussion of Sin in Chapter Two, illustrating how she is punished with reproduction and sexual violence, and how this contrasts with her queer birth while illustrating the poem's problematic stance toward fallen women. In my final chapter, I tackle the character of Eve, and argue that her narcissistic scene at the lake after her birth reveals her queer sexual desire for her feminine reflection. I also discuss how the poem sexualizes Sin and Eve, and how their physical appearances illustrate the state of women in the poem. I finish by arguing that a queer perspective of Milton is important because it allows modern critics to view as both illuminating and empowering.

## Introduction

*The king of glory in his powerful word  
And spirit coming to create new worlds.  
On Heavenly ground they stood, and from the shore  
They viewed the vast immeasurable abyss  
Outrageous as a sea, dark, wasteful, wild,  
Up from the bottom turned by furious winds  
And surging waves.... (7.208-214)*

### I. BEGINNINGS

When reading John Milton's epic poem *Paradise Lost*, it most likely is not readily apparent that a story about the birth and fall of the quintessentially heterosexual couple Adam and Eve is actually fraught with queerness. Yet as I will argue in the span of this thesis, Milton's language, characters, and scenes of reproduction are in fact inherently queer. Apart from the scene in Book 8 where Raphael describes sex between angels to Adam, I for the most part will not be using queer in terms of same-sex sexual and romantic relationships. Instead, I want to articulate that the aspects of gender, sexuality, and reproduction in the poem challenge normative binary thinking, an act that is in itself queer, and is the definition for queer that I will use.

In Chapter One, I will discuss the queer scenes and sites of reproduction in the poem, beginning as the poem does in Hell with its queered reproductive landscape and Sin's recollection of her narcissistic birth through primogeniture. I will then discuss Chaos as "the womb of nature and perhaps her grave," and the implications of both Chaos and Hell being spaces where birth and death are simultaneously present and possible, and why these paradoxes make these spaces queer. I will finish with Eve's birth, which I argue is queer because, like Sin, she is not given birth to normally by a woman,

but instead she is famously created out of Adam's rib, rendering Adam both her mother and her lover and God both midwife and Father.

In Chapter Two, I will delve in-depth into Milton's characterization of Sin, and the way that her queer birth and her incestuous relationship with her father, which results in painful and eternal childbirth and the radical transformation of her body, reveals the poem's commodifying and punitive treatment of its female characters and their bodies. I will also argue that in spite of the poem's notions of God's predestination, Sin's transgressive behavior reveals that even in a space as misogynist as *Paradise Lost*, there is queer and feminist potential through its female characters' actions.

Finally, in Chapter Three I will tackle Eve, and although I will not be arguing about whether or not she can be considered a feminist or misogynist character, I will argue the fact that from her very birth she is a queer one. Paying particular attention to her recollection of the lake scene in Book 3, I will discuss how the poem sets Eve up as a queer and imperfect character from her birth and from her first appearance in the poem. I will then compare her to Sin, for not only are they the sole female characters in the poem, but the similarities and differences in their characters reveal that although *Paradise Lost* is fraught with queer transgressive potential, ultimately its treatment of women and their bodies reveals its sexism.

## II. FEMINIST MILTON

Much work has been done surrounding feminist criticism of John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, from debates about whether Milton should be considered feminist or misogynistic, to discussions of Eve's place in the poem and how this ties into its debated misogyny.

Critics from famous writers such as Virginia Woolf and Mary Wollstonecraft to modern feminist critics argue that Eve's submission to Adam reveals the poem's undeniable sexism, while other scholars argue that although the environment of the poem is a misogynistic one, Eve is in fact a character who is able to undermine the gender hierarchy of the text.

Yet in the span of feminist critiques of *Paradise Lost*, it is difficult to find discussions on the queerness of the poem apart from Raphael's description of angel sex in Book 8.<sup>1</sup> The poem, in spite of its conservative subject matter, challenges multiple binaries and its characters and its language do not behave in ways that one would expect in a poem about the biblical creation and fall of man. As other academics have discussed, viewing *Paradise Lost* through a feminist lens reveals that it is neither entirely radical nor sexist in nature.<sup>2</sup> However, I will argue that critiquing it using modern notions of radical queerness complicates the poem even further in addition to revealing new insights, for *Paradise Lost*'s feminist, misogynist, and queer attributes are all tangled up amongst each other. As I will illustrate through the course of my thesis, although the poem appears on the surface to be heteronormative and conservative, it is in fact also full of queer transgressive potential that complicates and illuminates its preexisting feminist criticisms.

The discussion of whether or not *Paradise Lost* can be considered feminist is an important one, and the treatment and opinions of women during Milton's time will be discussed in the span of this introduction, but I would like to ground my analysis in the paper proper in the poem itself. Throughout this introduction I will situate myself in

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<sup>1</sup> Neil Forsyth discusses the queerness of Hell in his article "Milton's Womb," and

<sup>2</sup> See Elisabeth Liebert's "Rendering 'More Equal': Eve's Changing Discourse in 'Paradise Lost,'" Patrick J. McGrath's "Formal Resistance: Gender Hierarchy and Eve's Final Speech in 'Paradise Lost.'" "

feminist criticism of Milton in order to illustrate the ways that I will combine queer and feminist theories with specific instances in the poem where I have found signs of queerness and discursive womanhood. In this introduction I would like to examine the implications of looking backward at the poem through modern feminist and queer studies lenses, and the complicated tension between the poem's undeniable misogyny and its undercurrent of queerness.

### III. MILTON'S DIVORCE TRACTS AND THE "QUERELLE DES FEMMES"

One cannot write about women and sexuality in *Paradise Lost* without examining Milton's own views towards women, and the state of women societally in the 1600s. Although the poem itself is revealing of Milton's attitudes towards women and marriage, and lots of academic work has been done about this, his Divorce Tracts more explicitly illustrate Milton's complicated relationship with womanhood, so much of Milton criticism has dealt with both the poem itself and with his external political writings on divorce.<sup>3</sup> As critics posit, the English Civil War going on in the 1600s politically drive Milton's representations of marriage both in his Divorce Tracts and in *Paradise Lost*. Marriage, female sexuality, and female sexuality within marriage are all important themes of *Paradise Lost*, which as Maria Magro argues are drawn from Milton's political ideals about male liberty depending upon the domestication and sexualization of women.<sup>4</sup> Critics also argue that in writing *Paradise Lost*, Milton was influenced by debates about

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<sup>3</sup> See Maria Magro's "Milton's Sexualized Woman and the Creation of a Gendered Public Sphere," Melissa E. Sanchez's *Erotic Subjects*, Elpseth Graham's "'Vain Desire,' 'Perverseness' and 'Love's Proper Hue': Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Interest in Paradise Lost."

<sup>4</sup> Magro 98

women in early modern England, from the “Querelle des Femmes” of the seventeenth-century to witchcraft.<sup>5</sup> As many academics illustrate, *Paradise Lost* is a domestically political text, where Milton uses marriage, sexuality, reproduction, and gender to make sense of and argue about the complex politics going on at the time. Considering how much has been written about this, one can argue that drawing links between the poem and Milton’s relationship to debates about women is an important task. However, I would like to focus on *Paradise Lost* as a singular text, and although Milton’s life has influenced a lot of the feminist criticism about the poem, instead I would like to treat the poem as formally separate from both Milton and the society in which he lived. In the next section of the introduction I will be discussing more in-depth how I am bringing modern notions of queer theory to the poem, and in doing so I intend to set up how in my chapters proper I will focus in on the poem itself, using my modern knowledge of queer studies to view the poem from a fresh perspective while still keeping in mind its historical position.

#### IV. READING A QUEER *PARADISE LOST*

Like the study of *Paradise Lost*, the study of queer theory in its entirety is too expansive for me to adequately discuss in the short span of this introduction. So, I will be focusing not on queer theory in terms of the lived realities of queer people, but instead how it has been and can be used in reference to literature and its criticism.

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<sup>5</sup> See Shannon Miller’s “Serpentine Eve: Milton and the Seventeenth-Century Debate over Women,” Alinda J. Summers’ “Milton’s Mat(t)ereology: *Paradise Lost* and the Seventeenth-Century ‘Querelle des Femmes,’” and Sara van den Berg’s “Eve, Sin, and Witchcraft in *Paradise Lost*.”

The word queer has had a number of definitions, from meaning strange or eccentric,<sup>6</sup> to being used as a slur against LGBTIQ people, to being reclaimed as an umbrella term by the queer community, to finally being appropriated by the academic community. With its complicated history, queer is an incredibly charged word, both in its history as a slur and in that today it is not only used as an identifier, but also as a political ideal. The definition of queer that I will be relying on is “A political statement, as well as a sexual orientation, which advocates breaking binary thinking and seeing both sexual orientation and gender identity as potentially fluid.”<sup>7</sup> I will employ a definition not from the *Oxford English Dictionary* or a scholarly text but from an online LGBTIQ resource because I want to acknowledge that although this is an academic paper on a three hundred year old epic poem based on the Bible, using modern political queer ideals to discuss *Paradise Lost* will allow me to work within existing Milton criticism while also allowing me to bring modern ideas of queerness to it. As I previously discussed, Milton wrote *Paradise Lost* from a political perspective, so although in the year 2015 the poem may not immediately have much political resonance, using the political definition of queer reveals the link between the radical potential of queerness within both today’s patriarchal society and in the patriarchal space of the poem.

Feminist critics of *Paradise Lost* have viewed it from multiple perspectives, from it being an entirely and irreproachably patriarchal text,<sup>8</sup> to, as I and other critics view it, a text capable of simultaneously containing feminist transgressive potential *and* of being a

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<sup>6</sup> "queer, adj.1." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, March 2015. Web.

<sup>7</sup> "Definition of Terms." *Gender Equity Resource Center*. UC Berkeley Gender Equity Resource Center, n.d.

<sup>8</sup> See Christine Froula’s “When Eve Reads Milton: Undoing the Canonical Economy.”

text entrenched in the patriarchy. Elisabeth Liebert articulates in *Rendering "More Equal": Eve's Changing Discourse in "Paradise Lost,"*

In the case of *Paradise Lost* the text is complex enough to respond to the context of both feminist and patriarchal readings and to supply argument and counter-argument to both camps. This textual complicity suggests that it should be possible to find a middle ground, a reading that acknowledges Eve as subordinate and privileged simultaneously, at once liberated by Milton's revision of tradition and proscribed by the limitations of that revision.

Liebert is one critic of many who argue that *Paradise Lost* is neither entirely feminist nor misogynist, and that as Liebert writes, within it "it should be possible to find a middle ground." I argue that this middle ground is where the poem's queerness is located, for the queer nature of the poem is intrinsic to its inability to conform to binaries, including those such as feminist and misogynist, which so much of Milton criticism has focused on.

Before moving onto my analysis of the text itself, I would like to explicitly ground myself in Milton criticism, and clearly illustrate my use of the word queer. I do not exactly see *Paradise Lost* existing in a "middle ground" of feminism and patriarchy; instead, I believe that it is a combination of both, and as I will argue it incorporates them both through its treatment of reproduction, gender, and sexuality in such a way that renders it simultaneously queer and sexist, radical and patriarchal. I began this chapter with a quote from the poem, where Jesus, "the king of glory," is about to create new worlds from "the vast immeasurable abyss / Outrageous as a sea, dark, wasteful, wild." Although I will be dealing with God and Jesus very little, I feel that these lines encapsulate what I am attempting to do in this thesis. Just as *Paradise Lost* is capable of

being a text that is both feminist and sexist, so too is it a space where a vast immeasurable abyss can be transformed into entirely new worlds; and where characters such as Adam and Eve, and even Sin and Satan, that are usually thought of as engaging in the hetero-patriarchy of the poem, can in fact be queer themselves and through their behavior can illustrate the discursive queerness of the poem.

## Chapter One: *Paradise Lost's* Queer Reproduction

### I. QUEERED REPRODUCTION IN *PARADISE LOST*

In my introduction I discussed the definition of queer I will be using within my thesis, but I would like to reiterate that although I will be using queer in the sense of characters feeling non-normative sexual desire, I will also, and more importantly, be employing it to describe the non-normative state of reproduction in the poem, which will be the focus of this chapter. I am not focusing my argument in this chapter on the notion that the poem's characters are explicitly queer, but instead that their actions question the binarism of the poem, in reference to sex, gender, and the forms of reproduction. In this chapter, I will examine the queered nature of reproduction in the poem, from the physical landscapes of Hell, Chaos, and Eden to the characters themselves, including Satan and his daughter Sin, and Adam and Eve.

### II. QUEER ANGELS

Much of queer criticism of *Paradise Lost* has focused on Raphael's description of angel sex in Book 8, so I will begin this introduction with a close albeit cursory reading of these lines in order to ground myself in current queer discussions of the poem before branching off into my own argument. Raphael says to Adam,

To whom the angel, with a smile that glowed  
 Celestial rosy red, Love's proper hue,  
 Answered. Let it suffice thee that thou knowest  
 Us happy, and without love no happiness.  
 Whatever pure thou in the body enjoyest,

(And pure thou wert created) we enjoy  
 In eminence; and obstacle find none  
 Of membrane, joint, or limb, exclusive bars;  
 Easier than air with air, if Spirits embrace,  
 Total they mix, union of pure with pure  
 Desiring, nor restrained conveyance need,  
 As flesh to mix with flesh, or soul with soul. (8.620-9)

As Raphael describes, sex between angels transcends the sexual capabilities of humans, both in its purity and in the fact that “Total they mix,” every part of them integrating into with whom they have sex. Raphael describes sex between the angels as entirely genderless, imbuing it with a sense of queerness because through sex, the angels are able to transcend the gender binary. Many argue that God and the angels are always agender, however as I will illustrate in more depth in the following chapters, gender in the poem is quite explicit when the treatment of the poem’s female characters is compared to that of the male, and even supposedly agender, ones. Some critics also discuss this scene in reference to its homoeroticism between Raphael and Adam. Fisher writes in “Milton’s *Paradise Lost*,”

Raphael smiles; he does not shuffle, look down, turn aside. And burning red is the color of active love. Milton’s adding this one more detail of intense sensuality to Adam’s angelic teacher makes dramatic sense. Raphael’s registering so visually with his passionate sexuality stimulates Adam more than his maxims and warnings hinder Adam’s doting on Eve. ... To flush, not blush, with active love is

(besides dramatically right) certainly more angelic. The only problem is that Raphael is *not* talking to another angel. (3)

According to Fisher's argument, the homoerotic, or as I argue genderless, sex between the angels is allowed within the poem because they lack fleshly bodies when they intertwine, yet the homoeroticism between Raphael and Adam is problematic to the poem because of Adam's humanity, and implicitly because of his gender. As Fisher's quotation illustrates, Raphael's description of angel sex, as queer and homoerotic as it is, serves to underscore gender relations as they unfold around this scene. As much scholarship has focused on the queerness in this scene, I will finish my own discussion here in order to move onto my own arguments about a queer *Paradise Lost*.

### III. INFERNAL PROCREATION

Queered reproduction in the poem can be uncovered in a number of ways, one of which is Milton's use of language. The word "womb" materializes a number of times in the first few books in places where one might not expect it, such as in Milton's descriptions of the physical landscapes in Hell. Milton writes,

There stood a hill not far whose grisly top  
Belched fire and rolling smoke: the rest entire  
Shone with a glossy scurf, undoubted sign  
That in his womb was hid metallic ore,  
The work of sulphur. (1.679-673)

Milton's paradoxical use of the pronoun "his" in reference to the word "womb" immediately jumps, for not only is Milton referring to the sulfurous earth of Hell as a

“womb,” but he is doing so with a pronoun generally thought of as masculine. Although in his article “Milton’s Womb” Neil Forsyth asserts that Milton uses “his” as a gender-neutral pronoun (81), I contend that later examples of queered reproduction in the poem suggest that “his womb” is not as gender neutral as Forsyth suggests. In his article even Forsyth himself questions, albeit cursorily, whether “his womb” is as neutral as it might appear. As I will discuss in more detail later in this chapter, reproduction in the poem is a largely male act; Satan gives birth to Sin through primogeniture, God creates man, and then from Adam’s body God creates Eve. In this way, “his womb” is not neutral at all; instead it sets the stage for the nature of reproduction throughout the poem, an act traditionally thought of as feminine, which here is appropriated by men for at once heavenly and hellish deeds.

In spite of the poem’s name, Hell is the first landscape to which readers are introduced, contrasting it with later depictions of Eden while setting the stage for the queered nature of reproduction in the poem. Milton’s language in this section, such as “grisly top / Belched fire,” “glossy scurf,” and “the work of sulphur” paints a depiction of Hell as a gross, hot, smelly place, but the last two lines make it not solely a space of destruction, but also a space of capable of the means of creation. Even within the belching earth of Hell, sulfur has the potential to create anew. Only a few lines later, some of Satan’s cronies rend Hell’s womb of her “metallic ore,” further illustrating the reproductive nature of Hell. Milton writes,

Mammon, the least erected spirit that fell

From Heaven, ...

Men also, and by his suggestion taught,

Ransacked the center, and with impious hands  
 Rifled the bowels of their mother earth  
 For treasures better hid. Soon had his crew  
 Opened into the hill a spacious wound  
 And digged out ribs of gold. Let none admire  
 That riches grow in hell; that soil may best  
 Deserve the precious bane. (1.679-692)

As both these passages illustrate, *Paradise Lost* is wrought with paradoxes, illustrating how Milton imbues the poem with a sense of queerness within its very language. The contradictions in particular of “his womb” in the first quotation and “that riches grow in hell” and the “precious bane” of Hell’s mother earth in the second reveal the queer and reproductive nature of Milton’s Hell, for even in a place as sulfurous and grisly as Hell, “treasures better hid” can still exist. Yet Milton placing reproduction into the very earth of Hell is not as simple as saying that luxury is possible in both Heaven and Hell; the image of a fertile Mother Earth is a well-known one, but here Milton contrasts this fecundity with the fetidity of her “bowels,” queering notions of reproduction and gender. Additionally, Milton’s reference to the earth of Hell as “their mother earth” appears to contrast with his earlier reference to it as “his womb,” yet one can take this to mean that the landscape of Hell is capable of being simultaneously male and female and procreative and destructive. In a way that is quintessentially queer, Hell is capable of being many things at once, of inhabiting multiple spaces that are usually thought of as binaries, such as masculine and feminine and creative and destructive. In spite of Forsyth’s assertion that “his womb” creates “no gender confusion at all” (82), the contradiction of Hell

simultaneously being a feminine mother earth and having a masculine womb serves as evidence that “his womb,” and the landscape of Hell to which it refers, are not gender neutral in the least.

Milton’s descriptions of this Hellscape also queer even Edenic scenes of reproduction within the poem, for the “ribs of gold” evidently allude to Eve’s birth from Adam’s rib later. By pulling both reproduction and “treasures better hid” down from Heaven, Milton distorts, and queers them. Milton draws complicated parallels between the heavenly and hellish characters in the poem, and the “ribs of gold” in Hell serve as a precedent for such an act. Most readers know before going into the poem that Eve will later be created out of Adam’s rib, so this allusion is an act of foreshadowing both in that it foreshadows Eve’s specific birth, the masculine nature of birth in the poem in general, and the violent and commodifying treatment of women’s bodies. Both of these passages steal male reproductive power away from God and into Hell, making a Heavenly act profane. Milton referring to Hell’s “ribs of gold” and Hell’s masculine womb mimics, challenges, and defames the procreative powers of God and Eden, a theme that will reassert itself as the epic poem continues. But these quotations illustrate not only the complicated relationship between good and evil in the poem, but also the complicated relationship between the poem and its female characters.

The “ribs of gold” in line 690 appear to be a luxurious and perhaps even beautiful object in an otherwise loathsome space, but what truly highlights them is the violence with which they are ripped from the body of Hell’s mother earth. Milton’s language in this passage is fraught with imagery of sexual violation, from “impious hands” rifling mother earth’s bowels, a Miltonian synonym for the womb and female reproductive

organs, to the demons opening into her a “spacious wound.” It is important that only when the land is violated does Milton personify it as a woman, for although *Paradise Lost* is largely a story about creation, it is also undeniably a text that abuses and commodifies women’s bodies. Not only do Milton’s descriptions of Hell’s landscape set up the poem as a space that fosters male-centric reproduction, but they also set it up as a space that encourages the violation of women’s bodies. Milton’s reference to Hell as “mother earth” is further complicated by the fact later Eve is referred to quite often as the mother of mankind, conflating explicitly female reproduction and motherhood with rape. As Minaz Jooma writes in “The Alimentary Structures of Incest in *Paradise Lost*,”

A lust for political power, rendered as the gouging of a mother’s entrails, conflates the desire to possess a valuable commodity with male sexual appetite. Mammon’s example figures rebellion against the father specifically in terms of “rifling” that female who, as Freud would have it, most properly belongs to the father. The rape of “mother” earth, her enforced yielding of consumables and her bodily disfigurement are predicated upon the assumption that these will enable an alternate kingdom to be created. Each of these actions is graphically replicated in book 2 when Satan encounters Sin and Death guarding the Gates of Hell. (30)

I will draw parallels between Milton’s descriptions of Hell and his treatment of Satan, Sin, and Death in more detail later in this chapter, but here I want to focus on Jooma’s assertion that these passages “[conflate] the desire to possess a valuable commodity with male sexual appetite.” Eve and Sin are detailed characters of their own, but one cannot deny the fact that the first female body the reader has access to in the poem is a female personification of Hell who is violated violently and sexually. As Jooma posits, the

demons rifle mother earth not just to access her “treasures better hid,” an undeniable sexual innuendo, but also to rebel against God “the father.” This further complicates mother earth’s female body, for in these lines and later in the poem women’s bodies are treated as the property of their father; Sin’s belongs to Satan, and Eve’s belongs to Adam. These lines encapsulate how women in the poem are reduced to their bodies and more specifically their reproductive organs, for in these lines *mother* earth is nothing more than a body for men to ravage.

#### IV. THE CREATION OF SIN

After laying the groundwork for Hell to act as a site both of creation and dissolution in Book 1, Milton relays the story of Sin’s birth, the first procreative story of the poem, in Book 2. Not only is the epic’s first birth scene the most demonic, it is also the most disturbing. As Satan is making his way out of Hell on his journey to Eden, he runs into Sin, his daughter, who holds the key to get out of Hell. Even though Sin painfully burst from Satan’s head when he first thought of rebelling against God in front of all the other angels, he apparently has forgotten her completely and Sin needs to remind him of her existence. Sin asks him,

Hast thou forgot me then, and do I seem  
 Now in thine eyes so foul, once deemed so fair  
 In Heaven, when at the assembly and, in sight  
 Of all the seraphim, with thee combined  
 In bold conspiracy against Heaven’s king,  
 All on a sudden miserable pain

Surprised thee, dim thine eyes, and dizzy swum  
 In darkness, while thy head flames thick and fast  
 Threw forth, till on the left side opening wide,  
 Likest to thee in shape and countenance bright,  
 Then shining heavenly fair, a goddess armed  
 Out of thy head I sprung? (2.747-759)

The fact that Sin reminding Satan of her birth is the first birth scene of the epic is notable because on the surface *Paradise Lost* is about the divine creation of man, when in reality, creation of life in the poem is present even in the fetid bowels of Hell and from the sinful mind of Satan. Satan's begetting of new life without the interjection of either a woman or God is a narcissistic act, and it is this absence of God that separates the birth of Sin from the birth of Eve. Through the narcissistic birth of Sin, Satan engages in an act that is not only transgressive against God, but is also sexually and reproductively transgressive.

Immediately after Sin springs from his head, Satan has sex of dubious consent with her, resulting in the birth of Death. Sin is one of the most unfortunate characters of the poem, for Death then rapes her, giving life to "yelling monsters that with ceaseless cry" eternally burrow themselves into and out of her entrails (2.795). I am loathe to associate these acts of rape with queerness because I don't want to relate queerness with men's violence against women, however fictional and demonic they may be, but the reproduction of and surrounding Sin is certainly an example of non-normative procreation in the epic. Forsyth writes, "The whole scene is painful and perverse, self-love replacing mutual love, but the genders are not bent" (84). Although "the genders are not bent," Sin is not only born out of Satan's head, a place on the body as far from the

bowels as one can get, but she is also born “likest to [Satan] in shape,” and is thus not only his daughter, but his feminine mirror as well. As I will discuss in greater detail later, Satan immediately wants to have sex with Sin not merely because she is attractive to him, but because of their shared appearance. Thus, both in his creation of Sin and his carnal relations with her, Satan is replacing the love he should bear for God with a queer sexual desire for himself. Satan’s “painful and perverse self-love” is what renders Sin’s birth, and her subsequent sexual relationship with her father, queer. Sin’s hellish existence in Hell is an example of the disastrous effects of reproduction without the intervention of God, and her torturous existence can be attributed to the fact that she is the embodiment of sin, but it can also be seen as a result of Satan’s sinfully queered self-love.

## V. CHAOTIC CREATION

As Satan and the narrative move through their journey from the bowels of Hell to the Garden of Eden, so too do we as readers travel among different sites of irregular reproduction. One such site is Chaos, which Satan must cross in order to reach Paradise; Milton writes,

Into this wild abyss,  
 The womb of nature and perhaps her grave,  
 Of neither sea, nor shore, nor air, nor fire  
 But all these in their pregnant causes mixed  
 Confusedly, and which thus must ever fight  
 Unless the almighty maker them ordain  
 His dark materials to create more worlds. (2.910-916)

This quotation illustrates that as Chaos serves as the bridge between Hell and Eden, it combines the language of deterioration from Hell and the imagery of fecundity associated with Eden. Such a paradox is present in the second line, where Milton refers to Chaos as “the womb of nature and perhaps her grave”: the word “womb” references propagation while the word “grave” serves as a grim *memento mori*. This paradox mirrors those in earlier passages, where Milton associates wombs and bowels, while here he does wombs and graves. This line illustrates the simultaneously reproductive and destructive natures of the poem as a whole, for both reproduction and destruction occur in Hell and Eden alike, as emphasized through their combination in Chaos.

In these lines Milton refers to nature using female pronouns, harkening back to Hell’s male womb and its mother earth. Additionally, Milton describes Chaos as combining the “pregnant causes” of the four elements, invoking multiple meanings of the word pregnant. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, pregnant has a multitude of meanings, from “full of significance,” to its more commonplace meaning of being pregnant with a child. The first meaning references Chaos containing “his dark materials to create more worlds,” the potential to create not just new life but new worlds entirely, so Chaos is not solely made up of God’s “dark materials,” but of the essence of life itself. The latter meaning of pregnant is tied to Chaos’ function as “the womb of nature,” for it is a site that is simultaneously a tumultuous abyss and a fertile site full of God’s “dark materials,” conflating childbirth, a human and generally female act, with God’s ability to create entirely new worlds. Drawing from Milton’s descriptions of Chaos and Hell, reproduction in the poem thus far is a contradictory notion, for as sulfurous or

rampageous as Hell and Chaos are, they are also undoubtedly sites of both potential and explicit proliferation.

Chaos' ability to be both nature's womb and grave further illustrates the non-binary nature of the poem's landscapes. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, in the Bible "womb" means "the stomach as the seat of the feelings and affections; the heart, the soul." Both this definition of womb and the more modern meaning are complicated by the fact that Milton repeatedly uses this word in different and often paradoxical situations. From the masculine womb of Hell to the graveyard womb of Chaos, Milton queers reproduction throughout the poem through his conceptive language. As this *OED* definition illustrates, even when bowels are used as a synonym for wombs and when wombs are also graves, the ability to create new life, and new souls, is still present.

## VI. SAME-SEX REPRODUCTION IN EDEN

After spending a considerable amount of time in the reproductive spaces of Hell and Chaos, the reader is not told explicitly about Eve's birth until Book 8 of the epic.

Although arguably Adam and Eve's births are the most important ones of the poem, for it is they who lose paradise, the fact that their stories follow those of Sin and Satan means that one cannot help but compare their births, as Edenic as they are, to the violent ones in Hell. Adam says of God,

Who, stooping, opened my left side and took  
 From thence a rib, with cordial spirits warm  
 And life blood steaming fresh; wide was the wound,

But suddenly with flesh filled up and healed,  
 The rib he formed and fashioned with his hands,  
 Under his forming hands a creature grew,  
 Manlike but different sex, so lovely fair... (8.465-471)

Unlike Sin's birth from a single man, Eve's life is created through the body of Adam and the power of God, a queer act in its exclusion of the female body and its inclusion of two male ones. Additionally, although Eve's birth is relatively tame compared to Sin's, parallels remain. Adam speaks of his "life blood steaming fresh; wide was the wound"; although this wide wound immediately heals because it is God who made it, the mild gore of this scene is notable. God reaching into Adam's flesh for the rib also harkens back to when the demons of Hell "Opened into the hill a spacious wound / And digged out ribs of gold," both in the violence and in the fact that out of the wounds come ribs (Milton 1.689-91). Initially the golden ribs appear to be a simple allusion to Adam's, but comparing these two passages to each other highlights a potential sense of violence in Eve's birth that might not have been readily apparent otherwise. These lines illustrate that even God and Adam's birth of Eve requires some blood to be spilled.

Eve's birth serves as an Edenic parallel to Sin's, for both of them violently spring from body parts of men with whom they will later procreate. For as Jooma asserts,

The relationship between Adam and Eve in the poem must be rethought in light of the daughter's debt to her creator .... But, as Adam and Eve stand in precisely the same relation to one another (father-begetter to daughter-begot) as Satan and Sin, doesn't the union of Adam and Eve become as problematic as that of Satan and Sin? (33)

As Jooma asks, why does the poem treat Satan and Sin's relationship as incestuous yet it does not do so to Adam and Eve's? Forsyth says himself of Sin's birth that "the whole scene is painful and perverse, self-love replacing mutual love," and clearly Eve and Adam are meant to be an ideal relationship in contrast to Sin and Satan's violent one. Jooma's argument is placing modern notions of incest onto a relationship that neither Milton nor the Christian religion as a whole deem incestuous or problematic, yet the unmistakable parallels between Eve and Sin's relationships to the men who begat them remain. Additionally, as Erin Murphy writes in "Paradise Lost and the Politics of 'Begetting,'"

Though I have been metaphorically referring to Eve as an incestuous daughter-mother, the poem never describes her as Adam's daughter. Thus, the question of what Adam's familial title would be if he had one remains unanswered. Some critics have argued that Adam seems more Eve's mother than her father... (41)

As Murphy argues, Eve and Adam's relationship is full of the same incestuous potential as Sin and Satan's. Like Sin, Eve's birth is queered in that she is born from a man who is at once progenitor and spouse, yet it is evident that the text treats Sin's incestuous relationship with Satan as inherently different than Eve's divine one with Adam. What is also intriguing about this passage is that Murphy mentions that Adam "seems more Eve's mother than her father," in that he gives birth to her through his body, further queering Eve's birth by bending the gender of her "mother."

Eve's birth is queer not only because she is born from a man's body instead of a woman's, but also because two men are present and involved in her birth. Forsyth writes,

Here, as in Genesis, though sanitized and adapted to the idea of an all powerful God, a divine ‘mid-husband’ reaches in with his bare hands and brings out the material of life. What Milton does, if we take seriously the implication of ‘his womb’, is to align these various passages we have been accumulating with the ambivalent sexuality that pervades the poem, beginning with the very recreation in the opening lines of the cosmogonic myth itself. (84)

The “ambivalent sexuality” to which Forsyth refers is the queerness that I argue not only pervades the poem, but also defines its sense of reproduction. Everything about Eve’s birth is queered, from being born from the body of a man to the “divine mid-husband” who helps to bring her into the world he has created. The story of God creating Eve out of Adam’s rib is famous and is most likely not often read as queer, yet the way that Milton interprets it and the queerness of reproduction permeating the rest of the poem illustrate that within *Paradise Lost*, even well-known stories about the creation of the first heterosexual couple can be queered.

## CHAPTER TWO: SIN

### I. SIN'S BODY

Sin serves as a macabre reminder of what happens in *Paradise Lost* when love for oneself exceeds one's love of God. Her birth is an instance of queer, non-normative reproduction that illustrates the undercurrent of transgression in the poem, yet her punitively gendered existence highlights that queerness and misogyny are simultaneously present. Although Sin is an outward manifestation of Satan's narcissism, the poem's cruel treatment of Sin as a character of her own reveals the strange and often disturbing notions of femininity and womanhood in the poem, and how female transgressions are punished differently than male ones. This tension between the non-normative nature of her birth and her misogynistic treatment in the poem serves as an example of why whether *Paradise Lost* is a feminist or misogynist text is so contested.

In my previous chapter I discussed Sin's birth in reference to its queerness and non-normative nature, but here I would like to delve deeper into her description of her birth in order to reveal more about Sin as a character, not just an outward manifestation of Satan's queer narcissism. Sin recounts the story of her birth to Satan and the reader,

Hast thou forgot me then, and do I seem  
 Now in thine eyes so foul, once deemed so fair  
 In Heaven, when at the assembly and, in sight  
 Of all the seraphim, with thee combined  
 In bold conspiracy against Heaven's king,  
 All on a sudden miserable pain  
 Surprised thee, dim thine eyes, and dizzy swum

In darkness, while thy head flames thick and fast  
 Threw forth, till on the left side opening wide,  
 Likest to thee in shape and countenance bright,  
 Then shining heavenly fair, a goddess armed  
 Out of thy head I sprung? Amazement seized  
 All the host of Heaven; back they recoiled afraid  
 At first and called me 'Sin' and for a sign  
 Portentous held me; but familiar grown  
 I pleased, and with attractive graces won  
 The most averse, thee chiefly, who full oft  
 Thyself in me thy perfect image viewing  
 Becam'st enamored... (2.747-765)

Here Sin recounts her birth to Satan, who apparently has forgotten that an entirely new being once appeared out of his head. As this passage illustrates, an important aspect of Sin's character in the poem is her appearance; as I will discuss later, after being cast out of Heaven Sin takes on a monstrous form. Yet in this passage even though she is the physical embodiment of sinfulness, Sin is still "heavenly fair, a goddess armed" who won over the inhabitants of Heaven with her "attractive graces." Although the angels were right in thinking Sin a portentous sign, the fact that she was able to win them over specifically because of her physical attractiveness reveals the untrustworthy nature of beauty in the poem. These are the only details the reader learns about Sin's time in Heaven, but the fact that she is able to win over even "the most averse" of the angels with her appearance in spite of the fact that she *is* sin reveals the poem's distrust of women in

general, but more specifically its fear of beautiful women, and women who use their beauty to get what they want.

In addition to revealing the untrustworthy nature of women and feminine beauty in the poem, Sin's appearance in Heaven is also important because it is the cause of Satan's desire for her; Sin describes herself as "likest" to Satan in appearance, and that when he sees his "perfect image" in her he becomes "enamored" with her and thus decides to have sex with her. As discussed earlier, Sin's birth in and of itself is narcissistic because she is borne from Satan without the intervention of God or a mother, but the fact that Satan then has sex with the result of his self-love reveals the truly perverse nature of infernal sexual relationships in the poem. As Jooma writes in "The Alimentary Structures of Incest in Paradise Lost,"

As it is expressed here, the father's desire for his daughter is a form of self-gratification; if Satan's sexual attraction to Sin is attributable to her appearance, that appearance pleases by its likeness to his own. The incest is both an articulation of self, and a consolidation of self and self [sic] through a form of familial cannibalism whence the father libidiously consumes his own creation.

(29)

Even though Sin is indeed a separate character from Satan, their shared appearance and familial connection result in the cannibalism of Sin. Sin's birth serves as a multiplication of Satan's sinfulness and his hatred of God, but the children that result from their sexual union do nothing but consume and distort Sin, while Satan remains unpunished for his incestuous acts. This punishment is a reflection of Satan's transgression against God, but

the fact remains that Sin is the one doomed to an eternity of torture, and her body is the one ravaged by her incestuous sons.

Both Jooma and the poem regard Sin as a physical extension of Satan, but the gendered differences in how the poem treats them and Sin's limited attempts at autonomy reveal that she is a character of her own. The issue of consent in Satan and Sin's sexual relationship is an obsequious one, yet this passage illustrates how Sin exercises her limited sense of autonomy by desiring Satan. At the end of this passage she says that she "with attractive graces won / The most averse, thee chiefly." The results of Sin and Satan's union make it problematic at best to say that Sin is able to consent to sex with her own father, but her use of the verb "won" implies that she has the possibility of both action and autonomy. Sin's treatment in the poem gives her very little ability to make her own choices, but the fact that she is able to do so through her sexual desire of Satan reveals not only that she is a separate character from him, but that even in such a misogynistic text a character as reviled as Sin has a chance at free will.

Sin's first appearance in the poem is quite different from her description of her beauty in the above passage. Milton writes,

Before the gates there sat  
 On either side a formidable shape;  
 The one seemed woman to the waist and fair,  
 But ended foul in many a scaly fold,  
 Voluminous and vast, a serpent armed  
 With mortal sting.... (2.648-653)

In the first passage, Sin describes herself after her birth as a “heavenly fair” goddess, yet the quotation above paints an entirely different picture. Here, Sin “seems” like a beautiful woman from the waist up, but from the waist down she is a foul and “voluminous” serpent “with mortal sting.” Milton’s use of language such as “voluminous and vast” evokes images of a huge, formidable snake monster, contrasting Sin’s description of herself in Heaven as a beautiful goddess. Milton’s language here reveals that in spite of the fairness of Sin’s upper half, her foul lower half means that she only seems half human, and that the text cannot even be sure of that. Not only is Sin now an ugly, half-human monstrosity, she is also armed with a deadly sting like a scorpion. This passage is the first time the reader “meets” Sin, setting her up as a terrifying monster, not an angel or woman who has been punished for having sex of dubious consent with her satanic father. Although Satan’s appearance also changed after they fell from Heaven, the exact time that Sin’s body changes reveals the gendered mode of punishment in the poem.

After telling Satan about her own birth, she recounts the birth of their incestuous son Death;

Thine own begotten, breaking violent way  
 Tore through my entrails, that, with fear and pain  
 Distorted, all my nether shape thus grew  
 Transformed... (2.782-4)

In Book 1, Milton uses beautiful language to basically describe Satan’s visage after being cast out of Heaven as very large (196-8), and his actual transformation is given little detail. Yet Sin is doomed to become a half serpent through the painful and violent birth of Death. This birth scene mirrors Sin’s own in its violent language and monstrous

imagery, yet Sin's body is painfully made grotesque in a way that Satan's is not. Death tears through Sin's entrails, permanently distorting her "nether shape," an abnormally nebulous phrase for Milton. Milton also refers to Sin's lower half as her "entrails," rendering Sin's womb and vulva monstrous and inhuman. The change in perspective between this quotation and Sin's first appearance in the poem transforms Sin from a formidable monster into a woman, who "with fear and pain" is forced to give birth to Death as her reproductive organs are deformed. Even though Sin is sin, her fear and pain and the sudden and undesired birth that caused it make her a sympathetic character. The distortion only of Sin's lower half reveals not only that this is a punishment for having sex with Satan, but that it is an inherently gendered punishment that Satan does not share. Jooma writes,

Associated in this period [Milton's] with both gustation and gestation, the entrails are emphasized here, not for their role in Sin's self-nourishment, but with her role in nurturing others. Libidiously consumed by Satan, and flesh for Satan and Death's progeny, the daughter – ordinarily reliant upon the parent for sustenance – is transfigured by incest; she is cannibalized into a nourishing mother. (32)

Although Sin functions in the poem as an allegory for sin, her bodily transformation illustrates that as a female character, even an allegorical one, Sin is punished for both her existence and for having sex with Satan in painfully misogynistic ways. As a woman and now an infernal mother, Sin is not allowed to be a character of her own. Additionally, Murphy writes of Sin's reproductive scenes, "These violent images of reproduction gone awry figure the problem of a system turned in upon itself" (35). Through incest and rape, the poem forces Sin into a part of this system of reproduction, yet the system is focused

on Sin's body. Although Satan and Death are also parts of this system, Sin is the only who pays the price through the eternal ravaging of her body. For not only is her appearance permanently disfigured by Death's birth, but him immediately raping her results in the cannibalistic beasts who constantly feed off of her.

Here, I would like to discuss how not only are Sin's scenes of reproduction painful and violent, they are also ultimately scenes of rape. Although Sin's first sexual encounter with Satan *appears* to be consensual, the fact that it is between the newly born Sin and her father, and that consent is only somewhat apparent illustrates that Sin's relationship to sex is incestuous and of dubious consent from the start. In "'Embraces Forcible and Foul': Viewing Milton's Sin as a Rape Victim," Alexander A. Myers discusses the scene of Death raping Sin. He writes,

From the beginning, the setting of the rape is stark and cold, the echoing of the word *death* both creating an ominously aural quality and emphasizing the empty solitude of Sin's predicament. It is immediately apparent that the existence of Death is threatening to Sin and that she must face him alone. However, sympathetic sighs do come from the caves of the feminized hell, possibly insinuating a yonic symbol which corresponds to and empathizes with Sin's imminent genital violation and pain. (11)

In Chapter 1 I discussed how the demons pillaging Hell's Mother Earth served as a foreshadowing for the treatment of Sin. Myers refers to lines 785-95 of Book 2, immediately following Death's violent birth which ravaged Sin's body. When Sin is viewed as a rape victim, the alteration of her body and her doomed existence with the hell beasts make her fate seem all the more barbaric, not only because she has not actually

done anything wrong that deserves such punishment, but also because as Myers argues the language of the scene creates sympathy for Sin. Additionally, Myers' mention of a "feminized hell" off of my previous discussions of Hell's masculine womb and Mother Earth; although I argue that Milton's "feminized hell" sets up the poem as a queer space, in contrast to Myers I also argue that it sets up the poem as a space that is hostile toward women. What is particularly interesting about this quotation is that Myers says Hell empathizes with Sin, harkening back to the fact that they are both victims of assault.

What is also important to the scene at the Gate of Hell is the reunion of Sin and Death with Satan, which illustrates the entirely incestuous nature of Sin's sexuality in the poem. In "The Sources of Milton's Sin Reconsidered," Catherine Gimelli Martin discusses the relationship between Sin, Satan, and Death. Martin writes,

... the love triangle – insofar as there is one – which emerges between Satan and his Son Death is not even inversely analogous to the one-sided rivalry between Circe and Scylla. But ultimately, Satan and Death are not really capable of "romantic" rivalry at all: they neither compete for Sin's favors (Satan no longer even recognizes her after his grisly son's birth) nor is love of any kind lost between father, son, and mother, all of whom are cursed by their utterly disparate, utterly selfish, and infinitely self-consuming experiences of "love." (2)

This quotation particularly reminded me of Jooma's argument, for I feel that what is missing in Martin's argument is a discussion that Satan and Death do not need to "compete for Sin's favors" because as the poem illustrates they both own her body, as evidenced by the change in her body after giving birth to Satan's son Death, and by Death's immediate rape of her resulting in the hellhounds. The relationship between Sin,

Death, and Satan is not a “love triangle” so much as it is an instance of men assaulting the body of a woman, who is the only one in this situation who is punished. I have drawn attention to this quotation of Martin’s because it illustrates how the poem’s notions of queerness and sexism are bound to one another. In my first chapter, I argued that Sin’s birth is a scene of queer reproduction, yet here I want to point out that within the poem transgressions against binaries can still result in violence against women.

This gendered change in Sin’s body after giving birth to Death is another example of the importance of her appearance, but unfortunately for Sin the ravaging of her body does not end here. She then gives birth to hellhounds which are the fruit of Death’s rape; Milton describes Sin further,

About her middle round  
 A cry of hell hounds never ceasing barked  
 With wide Cerberean mouths full loud, and rung  
 A hideous peal; yet, when they list, would creep,  
 If aught disturbed their noise, into her womb  
 And kennel there... (2.654-659)

As if being doomed to an eternity with a “scaly fold” for a bottom half wasn’t enough, Sin is also forced to be eternally devoured by the results of her incestuous rape. Just as Sin’s serpentine lower half is gendered, so too is this eternal existence of being consumed by her hellhound progeny. As Jooma writes in her above quote, Sin is “transfigured by incest” from a beautiful angel into an ugly monster whose children constantly feed on her for “nourishment,” as Jooma puts it. Through this cannibalism, Sin is stripped down to little more than a womb, a source of nourishment and pleasure for both Satan and their

incestuous spawn. Eve and Sin's births create a certain amount of pain in Adam and Satan, but there is no birth scene in the poem that is quite as gruesome or as painful as the multiple ones to which Sin is subjected. Milton's reference to Sin's womb instead of her "nether shape" highlights the poem's use of reproduction as a punishment for women who transgress, or in Sin's case whose existence in itself is transgressive. As Murphy writes, "Unable to escape her progeny, Sin is reduced to a constant state of reproduction" (36). Not only is Sin's heavenly beauty wrenched from her, but specifically her womb and her vulva are made monstrous, revealing how women in the poem are reduced to their ability to be mothers, and specifically how Sin is punished by being forced to be a nourishing mother to her incestuous, cannibalistic spawn.

Eve is also reduced to her role of a mother by constantly being referred to as "the mother of all mankind," but Sin's transformation into a monster by becoming a mother renders her quite different from Eve in the eyes of the poem. As van den Berg writes in "Eve, Sin, Witchcraft, and Paradise Lost," "In the allegorical portrait of Sin, Milton's reference to European witches emphasizes violations of the human body – cannibalism, sexual perversion – that commence from an evil figured as female ugliness..." (351-2). Although the focus of my argument is not European witches, van den Berg's connection between evil, powerful women that witches signify and Sin is an important one. In this quotation, van den Berg concisely encapsulates Sin, for her entire allegorical existence is predicated on these violations of her body, violations that are ultimately caused by Satan's sin of defying God, not necessarily anything Sin has done up to this point in the poem apart from desiring her father, and even then the consent of their union is murky at best. The radical change in her appearance reifies not only the poem's distrust of vain

women, but also the dichotomy of good and beautiful versus bad and ugly, a dichotomy that is illustrated in Sin's reproductive organs. Sin's body is permanently altered in a gendered way that Satan and Death's bodies are not. Milton employs Sin as the allegorical personification of sin, but the fact that this allegory is embodied in the raped and ravaged body of a female character reveals how reproduction is used in the epic as a punishment for women who do not obey. In this case, rather than challenging binaries, the poem bolsters them by contrasting monstrous Sin to beautiful Eve through Sin's sexual assault.

Sin is not the only character whose appearance is altered by the fall from grace, but she is the only one whose appearance is changed in such a gendered way. In the first Book, Milton describes Satan in reference to his massive size; Milton writes that Satan is "in bulk as huge / As whom the fables name of monstrous size, / Titanian, or Earth-born, that warred on Jove..." (1.196-8). Satan's description here mirrors Sin's first appearance later in the poem when Milton describes her as "voluminous and vast," yet this is the extent of Satan's physicality in Book 1, and the extent to which Satan and Sin share an appearance after Death's birth. As enormous as Milton says Satan is, his agendered, powerful, and almost godly appearance after falling contrasts sharply with Sin's. This difference, along with the fact that Sin only changes after giving birth to her incestuous child, highlights that Sin's infernal punishment is a result of her gender while Satan's is not.

## II. SIN AND SPENSER'S "ERROUR"

Sin's treatment as contained within *Paradise Lost* is important to understand the dichotomy between the queer, transgressive potential of the poem when viewed through a modern lens and the fact that its female characters are treated in incredibly misogynistic and violent ways. However, the fact that Sin is an allusion to Spenser's "Error" from *The Faerie Queene* lends a new facet to her treatment in the poem. Error and Sin are both female monsters with the upper half of a woman and the lower half of a snake "with mortal sting" whose beastly children burrow into their mother to be reborn again over and over. Spenser describes Error,

By which he saw the ugly monster plaine,  
 Halfe like a serpent horribly displaide,  
 But th'other halfe did womans shape retaine,  
 Most lothsom, filthie, foule, and full of vile disdain.

And as she lay upon the durtie ground,  
 Her huge long taile her den all overspred,  
 Yet was in knots and many boughtes upwound,  
 Pointed with mortall sting. Of her there bred  
 A thousand yong ones, which she daily fed,  
 Sucking upon her poisonous dugs, each one  
 Of sundry shapes, yet all ill favored:  
 Soone as that uncought light upon them shone,  
 Into her mouth they crept, and suddain all were gone. (Spenser 1.123-135)

This quotation illustrates how heavily Milton draws from Spenser's Error in his descriptions of Sin, from the serpentine lower half "with mortal(l) sting," to the monstrous children who eternally feed from their mother and have the ability to retreat back within her. Although the exact words used to describe Error and Sin are not always exactly the same, they share a similar tone; Error is "Most lothsom, filthie, foule, and full of vile disdain," and Sin is "formidable," and "voluminous and vast." In addition to being monstrous in appearance, Sin and Error's womanhood is also important. Neither needed to be a woman to be a half-snake monster with hellhounds eternally eating them, but Spenser and Milton's choice to make them women reveals their fear of femininity. Yet although Sin and Error are similar in appearance and in gender, their texts treat them quite differently. As Martin argues, "Sin's 'sting' is fully internal, not external..." (3). As I have discussed, Sin is punished by being eternally cannibalized by her hellhound children, which is the sting to which Martin refers. In contrast, Error's relationship to her monster children appears more symbiotic and less parasitic. Error does end her stint in *The Faerie Queene* with death, but she is able to use her sting against others while Sin's is eternally used against herself.

While Sin is both an allusion to Error and the allegorical personification of in, Error is the one who is more allegory than character. Both Sin's and Error's initial appearances are described by an omniscient narrator, but what separates Sin from Error is that eventually she is given free reign of her history and is allowed to tell it to the reader from her point of view. While equally monstrous in appearance, Sin actually has the chance to win sympathy from the reader, while Error is a terrifying monster from start to finish.

Sin's appearance is based off of Error and quite often Milton's language parallels Spenser's, but their treatment as characters varies greatly. Although both are equally gruesome in appearance, Error is the only one who does outright monstrous and violent things. In a gruesome scene, she attacks Redcrosse as a result of very little provocation before being violently murdered. Spenser writes,

Yet kindling rage, her selfe she gathered round,  
 And all att once her beastly body raizd  
 With doubled forces high above the ground:  
 Tho wrapping up her wretched sterne arownd,  
 Lept fierce upon his shield, and her huge traine  
 All suddenly about his body wound... (155-160)

Both Error and Sin transgress against the hero of their story, in Error's case Redcrosse and in Sin's God, but the ways they go about their transgressions highlight their differences. Error is a violent and formidable monster who attacks Redcrosse for no reason, and Spenser's descriptions of her instill an understandable sense of fear in the reader. In contrast, by allowing Sin to be the narrator of her own story Milton gives her a sense of sympathy, so when she does actively defy God the reader can understand why.

Milton writes,

To whom the incestuous mother thus replied:  
 "Thus, therefore, on these herbs and fruits and flowers  
 Feed first, on each beast next, and fish and fowl,  
 No homely morsels, and whatever thing  
 The scythe of Time mows down devour unspared,

Till I, in man residing through the race,  
 His thoughts, his looks, words, actions, all infect  
 And season him thy last and sweetest prey.” (10.602-609)

In this passage, Sin and Death arrive in Paradise and she instructs him to desiccate it, while she promises to “infect” all of mankind. This quotation illustrates Sin’s true transgressive potential, and ultimately separates her from Error. In *The Faerie Queene*, Error is nothing more than a monster who attacks Redcrosse because of her monstrosity, but in *Paradise Lost* Sin is a complex, while still problematic, character with desires and feelings of her own. She is not simply an allegory for sin or an allusion to Error, but is instead a complicated female character who still manages autonomous action in a text that allows very little of that for women. Additionally, Error attacks and is killed by a single man, while Sin desires not only revenge against God, but to destroy all of Paradise and to infect all of mankind. In this way, Sin’s transgressions are far more revolutionary than Error’s. Sin wants revenge against God because she wants to please Satan, but also because she wants to return to Heaven. The poem never posits Sin’s desire for revenge as a result of her distorted body, incestuous rape, or being eternally consumed by hellhounds, but the fact that she uses what free will she has to seek revenge in spite of all these things reveals that Sin is far more than a mere allegory or allusion.

### III. SIN’S TRANSGRESSION OF CHOICE

There is a wealth of literature about free will versus God’s will in *Paradise Lost* that I cannot begin to discuss in any meaningful way here, but the fact remains that God making Sin the keeper of the gate between Hell and Chaos is a strange decision on God’s

part, considering that he recently cast her and her father out of Heaven, and he probably knows that Sin, being sin, will disobey him in order to help her lover and father.

Regardless of whether God knew or planned that Sin would open the gate for Satan, what is important here is Sin's *choice* to defy God, not whether or not God orchestrated her defiance. Sin says to Satan,

Thou art my father, thou my author, thou  
 My being gav'st me; whom should I obey  
 But thee, whom follow? Thou wilt bring me soon  
 To that new world of light and bliss among  
 The gods who live at ease, where I shall reign  
 At thy right hand voluptuous, as beseems  
 Thy daughter and thy darling, without end. (2.864-870)

This quotation illustrates Sin's twin reasons for opening the gates of Hell for Satan, for it is partly out of a desire to obey and please her father slash beloved, and it is partly because she wants to return to Heaven. In this way, although Sin is obeying one man, Satan, she is also making the autonomous choice to disobey another. The ethics of Sin and Satan's sexual relationship are convoluted, but this passage is the first instance in the poem where Sin is able to choose her fate after being ravaged by childbirth. Until this point, everything that has happened to her is because of the actions of men – she is only born because Satan has the first sinful thought, Satan is the one who chooses to have incestuous and narcissistic sex with her, and then Death irrevocably changes her body through his birth and subsequent rape. In this passage, Sin imagines herself voluptuously reigning at Satan's side, an image that illustrates Sin casting off her subservience through

her *choice* to open the gates for Satan, and her desire to reign alongside him as an equal.

As problematic and misogynistic as Sin's existence as a character is, this moment of defiance reveals her potential as a transgressive character.

## CHAPTER THREE: QUEER EVE

### I. INTRODUCTION

Sin and Eve are the only two female characters in *Paradise Lost*, and the reader is introduced to Sin and the landscape of Hell long before meeting Adam and Eve and exploring Paradise, so Eve's characterization in the poem is undoubtedly linked to Sin's. In many ways the poem treats them as opposites, with Eve representing the ideal mother-woman and Sin representing how incredibly wrong womanhood can go. Yet, whether Milton intended it or not, Sin and Eve share a number of similarities, complicating both of their characters and revealing the queer and feminist potential of the poem. In this chapter, I will explore Eve's sense of queerness, and the differences and similarities between her and Sin and what they reveal about the state of womanhood in the poem.

### II. EVE'S QUEER BIRTH

I discussed the queer nature of Eve's birth in my first chapter, but I would like to touch on it again before discussing Eve as a queer character herself. The reader learns about her birth when Adam tells Raphael the story of his life. Although in this chapter I will discuss the scene immediately following Eve's birth as she tells it to Adam, it is important that Adam recounts the actual story of Eve's birth, not her. This contrasts with the story of Sin's birth, which she relates to Satan and the reader. I do argue that Eve's story of the lake scene parallels Sin's birth tale, but the fact that it is Adam who has the agency to describe Eve's actual birth illustrates her submission to him. Adam says,

Who, stooping, opened my left side and took

From thence a rib, with cordial spirits warm

And life blood streaming fresh; wide was the wound,  
 But suddenly with flesh filled up and healed.  
 The rib he formed and fashioned with his hands;  
 Under his forming hands a creature grew,  
 Manlike but different sex, so lovely fair  
 That what seemed fair in all the world seemed now  
 Mean, ....  
 She disappeared and left me dark; I waked  
 To find her or forever to deplore  
 Her loss and other pleasures all abjure... (8.464-480)

As these lines illustrate, Adam centers Eve's birth, and the moments following it, around himself. It is important to note that when Adam tells Raphael the story of his life, he includes Eve's birth without detailing her own feelings around it. Instead, he focuses on his own, from excitement about her beauty to sadness when she disappears. Eve is an integral part of the poem, but as these lines illustrate, and as I will argue in this chapter, the poem treats her as ultimately submissive to Adam. Before moving on to my discussion of Eve herself, I would like once again to mention the queer and masculine nature of her birth. She is born from the body of one man and is brought into existence by another, a queer act in its exclusion of the female body. As I will argue, Eve's desire for her reflection instill in her a sense of queerness, that while similar to her birth in its challenging of sexual binaries, is ultimately different in that Eve's queerness is quintessentially feminine, while her birth is a result of masculine bodies.

### III. NARCISSISTIC EVE

After spending the first three books of the poem in Hell, the reader is finally introduced to Adam, Eve, and Paradise in Book 4, where we learn about Eve's first moments of existence when she describes them to Adam. This is reminiscent of when Sin tells the story of her own birth to Satan, yet the differences between these two scenes is that Sin has agency over the telling of her actual birth, while Eve only has agency over the moments following it. Yet although the story of Eve's birth is treated by the poem as fundamentally about Adam, I argue that Eve's own autobiography illustrates her queerness. She says,

That day I oft remember, when from sleep  
I first awaked and found myself reposed  
Under a shade of flowers, much wondering where  
And what I was, whence thither brought and how.  
Not distant far from thence a murmuring sound  
Of waters issued from a cave and spread  
Into a liquid plain... (4.449-455)

This is an incredibly loaded passage, and as it is the reader's first view into Eve's mentality, it reveals a quite a bit about how her characterization will unfold as the poem progresses. Milton's descriptions of Eden throughout the poem are languid and flowery, but this quotation in particular is notably feminine, such as in the "shade of flowers" under which Eve first awakes. The lake almost seems to seduce Eve, murmuring to her as a "liquid plain" emerges from a cave, imagery evocative of female genitalia. This lake is neither babbling nor loud; instead, it gently murmurs to Eve, giving it a gentle and almost

delicate tone, and ultimately imbuing it with a sense of female sensuality. Its description as a “liquid plain” is also soft and feminine, as the “L’s” roll off of one’s tongue, aurally evoking the murmuring, seductive lake. A sense of feminine sexuality pervades Eve’s entire speech from lines 449 to 466, and the above quotation is only the first seven lines.

Eve continues her description of the lake,

...then stood unmoved

Pure as the expanse of Heaven; I thither went

With unexperienced thought and laid me down

On the green bank to look into the clear

Smooth lake that to me seemed another sky. (4.455-460)

Based off of Eve’s description, one cannot help but see why she was so drawn to the lake. She describes it as simultaneously pure and expansive, smooth and sky-like. Eve describes the lake not just as pure, but “Pure as the expanse of Heaven,” making the lake’s sensuous femininity seem almost heavenly ordained. The lake is both awesome and seductive, drawing Eve to lie down next to it and gaze into it, as if she is gazing into a lover’s eyes. Later in the poem Adam and Eve’s sex scenes are tied to the natural world of Paradise, so it is a pointed connection that Eve’s queer self-desire is also indelibly linked to the natural mirror in which she sees herself. Additionally, Mandy Green points out in *Milton’s Ovidian Eve*, “A number of critics have commented on the “womb-like” nature of this environment in which Eve, as yet speechless, finds it difficult to distinguish between her self and the world outside herself” (29). As I have discussed in previous chapters, the word “womb” and its synonyms within the poem are incredibly loaded, so the fact that Eve’s lake is another landscape in the poem with reproductive imagery is

notable. Yet as critics have pointed out, the scene between Eve and her reflection is not one of reproduction, but as Green puts it, it is one of “sterile recursion” (31). However, I argue that what is important about this scene and the lake is not their lack of reproductive possibilities, but their pervading femininity. Wombs hold the possibility to create anew, but in the poem they are also sexually charged, making this scene all the more queer and feminine.

It is in the following lines where I argue the poem gets truly queer, and apart from the angel sex scene later in the poem, I argue that these lines are the only other instance of explicit queer sexual desire. Eve says,

As I bent down to look, just opposite,  
 A shape within the watery gleam appeared,  
 Bending to look at me; I started back;  
 It started back. But pleased I soon returned;  
 Pleased it returned as soon with answering looks  
 Of sympathy and love. There I had fixed  
 Mine eyes till now and pined with vain desire... (4.461-466)

The language leading up to this section is incredibly sensual, so it seems only fitting that Eve would also feel desire for whatever or whomever she sees in the seductive lake. But what makes this desire most interesting is that it is not only Eve’s own reflection, but also that it is her own *feminine* reflection. It would be easy to argue that this scene of Eve’s narcissism is indicative that she is doomed to fall from the start, but Milton’s use of beautiful and even romantic language suggests otherwise. Sin’s scenes of rape and incest, which the poem clearly posits as sinful, are depicted using violent language, clearly

contrasting with the sensuous language used in this passage. Immediately following these lines God chastises Eve and leads her back to Adam, but the fact that the mother of the human race's first romantic desire is for a woman complicates the seemingly normative nature of the poem. Up until this point, I have discussed the queerness in the poem not in terms of same-sex desire, but in terms of non-normative reproduction and Milton's use of queered language. However in this passage, I argue that Eve's, the supposedly heterosexual mother of all mankind, first sexual desire is not for Adam but for a woman in a lake, whom only later she realizes is herself. Eve is not attracted to the lake and to this reflection because she sees herself in it, but because she sees a beautiful woman staring at her with "looks / Of sympathy and love." It is not until God intervenes that Eve believes that this desire is "vain," so while this scene is indeed one of narcissism, I argue that more importantly it is one of Eve's queer desire.

Even though Eve is gazing lovingly at her own visage in this passage, what draws her to the reflection is not necessarily its physical beauty, but the "sympathy and love" with which it looks at her. As I discussed in the previous chapter on Sin, the appearance of women in the poem is important to their characterization, and Eve's appearance is no exception. Yet in Eve's case, it is she who describes the appearance of the reflection to Adam, and even after God tells her that it is her own reflection and sends her back on her way to Adam, Eve prefers her own intrinsically feminine beauty to Adam's. She says,

Till I espied thee, fair indeed and tall,  
 Under a platan, yet methought less fair,  
 Less winning soft, less amiably mild,  
 Than that smooth watery image; back I turned;

Thou, following, cried'st aloud, "Return, fair Eve..." (4.477-481)

Even after God tells her in the preceding lines that what she desires is her own reflection, when Eve sees Adam and his physical appearance does not hold up to her reflection's, she tries to flee. What is intriguing about these lines is not only that Eve has no qualms with telling Adam that she once preferred her own reflection to him, but also the feminine language that pervades it, such as in the lake scene. Eve describes her reflection as "winning soft," "amiably mild," and also more fair than Adam. Eve merely describes Adam as "fair indeed and tall," devoting far more time here and in earlier lines to describe the feminine beauty of the woman in the water. Soft and mild call to mind images of femininity and womanhood, illustrating that Eve prefers her reflection to Adam not only because it is fairer, but specifically because it is feminine.

It is only ever the other characters in the poem who use the word "fair" to describe Eve's appearance, for in these lines Eve uses the word "fair" in reference to Adam and uses it to compare him to her reflection, yet in the final line of this quotation it is Adam who refers to her as "fair Eve," and in a passage I will discuss shortly God calls Eve a "fair creature." These descriptions parallel Sin's description of herself in Heaven as "heavenly fair" in an interesting way. The poem contrasts Sin's "fair" appearance in Heaven with her monstrous appearance in Hell, and both Sin and Satan valued her in Heaven solely because of her fair likeness to Satan. Yet Eve desires her reflection not because it is fair, or even because it looks like her, but because it is soft, mild, sympathetic, and loving, all attributes that are inherently feminine. While Sin is the result of Satan's narcissistic self-desire, Eve's queer desires are portrayed in a more appealing way. Ultimately, I argue that these lines illustrate Eve's queerness; even though later in

the poem she goes on to have a lot of sex with a man and eventually becomes the mother of the human race, the fact remains that Eve's first instance of romantic and sexual desire is for a woman, whom she only later learns is herself. In a poem that values male characters over female ones, Eve valuing femininity over masculinity is an act of transgression.

God and Adam treat Eve's desire for her reflection as an ignorant, childish mistake on Eve's part, but viewing this scene as one not of narcissism but of queerness sheds new light on God and Adam's responses, and the way that they correct and redirect her queer desire. Eve tells Adam,

Had not a voice thus warned me: "What thou seest,  
 What there thou seest, fair creature, is thyself;  
 With thee it came and goes; but follow me,  
 And I will bring thee where no shadow stays  
 Thy coming and thy soft embraces; he  
 Whose image thou art, him thou shalt enjoy  
 Inseparably thine, to him shalt bear  
 Multitudes like thyself and thence be called  
 "Mother of human race." (4.467-475)

Here, God refers to Eve as a "fair creature," at once patronizing her by calling her a creature and reprimanding her for her apparent vanity. It is important to note that Eve's retelling of the lake scene historically occurs *after* these lines, so her reference to her "vain desire" earlier can be seen a result of God's reprimand, for one can argue that while initially feeling the desire there was no way for her to know that it was vain. As I have

argued, it is only other characters in the poem who refer to Eve as fair, and instead she refers to her reflection using specifically feminine language. This passage illustrates how the poem and its characters shame Eve for her queer self-desire; it is only after God intercedes that Eve comes to understand that her sexual desire for the woman in the lake is wrong. Yet the poem, and Eve herself, do not treat Eve's self-desire as a transgression against her husband or God, but instead as a silly mistake that God quickly rectifies. Viewing this scene not through a narcissistic lens but a queer one problematizes it even further. I argue that this is a scene of very real queer desire, yet neither the poem nor its critics view it that way, focusing instead on the narcissism. Eve is a very sexual and sexualized character, so it is paradoxical that this scene is not viewed in a sexual or romantic way.

What is also interesting in this quotation is that God convinces Eve to go back to Adam by telling her that she is of his image, which is particularly interesting considering that he immediately admonished her for desiring *her* own image. This passage evokes the complicated ways that the poem treats external reflections of oneself. Both Eve and Sin are born from the bodies of their sexual partners, but Eve and Adam are clearly treated as husband and wife, while Sin and Satan are daughter and father, and their relationship is inherently incestuous while Adam and Eve's is heavenly ordained.

These lines reveal the disparity between how Eve sees herself, even after God admonishes her, and how Adam and God see her. Although God has led Eve in the correct direction of Adam, her desire for womanly traits remains, revealing her transgressive potential as a character. Christine Froula writes in "When Eve Reads Milton: Undoing the Canonical Economy," "In the space between, however, Eve

remembers an origin innocent of patriarchal indoctrination, one whose resonances the *covering* trope of narcissism does not entirely suffice to control” (327). Eve ultimately goes back to Adam and does indeed become the mother of the human race as God ordains, but the fact that in spite of this she still prefers her own feminine qualities to Adam’s masculine ones illustrates that even under the paternalistic paradigm of the poem, one cannot deny that Eve’s first experience of romantic desire is for a woman, a fact which is in itself radical. Additionally, as Minaz Jooma writes in “The Alimentary Structures of Incest in *Paradise Lost*,”

Because the divine voice gives Eve in response to Adam’s desire, it must also construct Eve’s desire as responsive to his – Eve’s desire is actually precluded. Expressly designed to sate Adam’s desire, Eve cannot but respond. Thus Adam’s contract with his creator propels Eve into a situation of indebtedness to her creator. (35)

This quotation is even more resonant when viewed in reference to the lake scene; while Eve’s desire for Adam is supposed to be designed in her very nature, the lake scene reveals that before the male influences of God and Adam, Eve has the innate ability to feel desire not for Adam but for a woman. In the next section I will discuss sex between Adam and Eve, but I would like to finish my discussion of Eve’s queerness by asserting that the fact that she does return to Adam and have sex with him does not erase her queerness. If anything, her queer desire complicates her sexual relationship with Adam, and as Jooma posits, Eve’s initial desire for a woman complicates her sexual “indebtedness” to Adam.

#### IV. EVE AND ADAM

Intriguingly, Adam and Eve's first sex scene immediately follows Eve telling Adam how much she prefers her own image to his. Yet in spite of Eve's apparent queerness, she instigates their first sexual encounter of the poem. Milton writes,

So spake our general mother, and, with eyes  
 Of conjugal attraction unreproved  
 And meek surrender, half embracing leaned  
 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  
 Smiled with superior love, as Jupiter  
 On Juno smiles when he impregns the clouds  
 That shed May flowers, and pressed her matron lip  
 With kisses pure. (4.492-502)

This scene directly contrasts the lake scene, where Eve and her reflection stare into each other's eyes as equals. Instead here, Eve gives herself to Adam "with meek surrender," and Adam even desires her because of her "beauty and submissive charms." This sex scene quite explicitly illustrates the disparity between Adam and Eve; it even says that he smiles at her "with superior love." As beautifully as this scene is written, one cannot help but feel that it illustrates Adam's conquest of Eve through sex. Eve's first instinct after her birth is to stare lovingly into the eyes of a woman for all eternity, but she is quickly corrected first by God and then by Adam, and the fact that these admonishments are

immediately followed by Adam and Eve's sex scene reveals how the poem uses sex against women. Sin is punished for desiring and having sex with Satan through Death's birth, and here sex is used as a corrective measure to transform Eve from a transgressive queer into Adam's wife, and humankind's mother. Both Sin and Eve are punished for transgressing against God through sex and childbirth, but in Eve's case her punishment is dealt through flowery language.

Eve's appearance is an important facet of her treatment in the poem, and this line perfectly encapsulates what both Adam and the narrative desire from Eve— her beauty and her submission. This Eve is a far cry from the one whom she described staring at her reflection with vain desire. The poem codes Adam and Eve's prelapsarian sexual desire for each other as good, and all other sexual desire, from Eve's desire for her own reflection to Satan's narcissistic self-love through Sin, as bad. Yet the parallels between Adam and Eve and Satan and Sin complicate this binary of good versus bad sexual relationships. Milton regularly refers to Eve as "our general mother," as in line 492 from Book 4, or "mother of all mankind," constantly reminding the reader that this pure, beautiful, and ultimately submissive creature is Our Mother. But the fact that Milton parallels her to Satan from her birth ensures that regardless of her innocent behavior in this quotation, Eve is fallen from the start and is ultimately incapable of being the submissive wife and mother that God and Adam so want her to be.

#### V. EVE'S "RUIN"

Even though the poem treats Eve as The Mother, she is sexualized throughout most of her appearances. Eve and Sin have sex throughout the poem, consensual and otherwise, and

their bodies are sexualized. At the start of the poem Eve at least has some semblance of agency when she retells the lake story, but in her sex scenes with Adam her submission to him is sexualized. But the point in the poem where Satan pursues Eve and convinces her to fall is the most troubling, for his seduction of her is sexualized using the language of rape. Milton writes,

Such pleasure took the serpent to behold  
 This flowery pot, this sweet recess of Eve  
 Thus early, thus alone, her heavenly form  
 Angelic, more soft and feminine  
 Her graceful innocence. Her every air  
 Of gesture of least action overawed  
 His malice and with rapine sweet bereaved  
 His fierceness of the fierce intent it brought. (9.455-462)

Eve's "sweet recess" and her "flowery pot" are quite obvious references to her vulva. Milton also refers to Sin's reproductive organs using vague language such as of her "nether shape," yet although Sin's body is monstrous in comparison to Eve's, somehow this description of Eve is far more chilling than that of Sin. "Her heavenly form" is also reminiscent of Sin describing herself in Heaven as "heavenly fair," yet in Eve's case the focus is specifically on her body, and the description is coming from the point of view of a voyeuristic predator, not from her own as in Sin's case. She is also described here as "soft and feminine," paralleling Eve's description of her reflection as soft and mild. Evidently the last two lines reveal that all these sexualized qualities of Eve make Satan question his purpose, but the fact that it took her sexualized submission and femininity to

make Satan waver is troubling. Sin is sexualized to denigrate her character and Eve is sexualized to augment hers.

Before approaching Eve, Satan says, “The way which to her ruin now I tend” (9.493). One of the *Oxford English Dictionary*’s definitions of ruin is “dishonor of a woman caused by her seduction and subsequent abandonment; degradation resulting from this.” Milton’s specific use of the word ruin further imbues Eve’s fall with connotations of rape. When Satan actually seduces Eve into eating the fruit he is complimentary, but not sexual, calling her “A goddess among gods,” “Empress of this fair world, resplendent Eve,” (9.548, 5568). But the fact that Satan does not actually *seduce* Eve into falling, yet all of the language surrounding it is incredibly sexual, further illustrates how the poem reduces its women to sexual objects.

## VI. EVE AND SIN

Throughout this chapter, there has undoubtedly been an undercurrent of comparison between Sin and Eve, for even though the poem posits them as opposites, their shared gender and paralleled experiences illustrate that a discussion of Eve cannot help but also be a discussion of Sin. Yet in this section, I would like to discuss the two of them more explicitly, and detail how the way that their characters are crafted in tandem with each other challenges and creates a sense of womanhood in the poem.

What is notable about the poem is the autonomy the characters have in their birth stories; Adam, Eve, and Sin all recount the tales of their births to other characters and ultimately to the reader. Both Eve and Sin tell their birth stories to their father/lovers, Sin

to urge her father not to kill their incestuous offspring, and Eve to cement her devotion to Adam, at least according to Hillier. He writes,

In the formal mirror patterning of her lyric [4.635-58] Eve corrects her formerly lukewarm interest in Adam and moderates the quasi-narcissistic absorption she displays shortly after her creation on first beholding her own reflection during her first moments of waking consciousness (440-91) .... Even Eve's experience of awakening by the pool and laying eyes upon her reflection is an opening move to her attainment of a full awareness of what presence and absence mean to her, a concept Eve goes on to explore in her mirror poem when she imagines the possibility of Adam's absence and its effects... (3)

Hillier goes on to quote lines 460-65 from the lake scene in book four. I disagree that in her retelling of the lake scene Eve "imagines the possibility of Adam's absence and its effects." What is so striking about the lines from Book 4 is their absence of Adam; even though Adam is Eve's audience, he and his masculinity are strikingly absent from Eve's speech. Additionally, the fact that both God and Adam are needed to draw her back to Adam, and the fact that Eve tells all of this to him, reveals that Eve's speech is not quite as corrective as Hillier asserts. Eve is immediately born into Adam's absence, and it is only through God and Adam's correction that she learns that Adam's existence is apparently so intrinsic to her own. I argue that if Eve's birth reveals anything about other characters of the poem, it would be Sin. Murphy writes,

Through its representation of a self-encounter, Eve's birth unfolds what Sin's narration conflates. Though Eve's moment at the pool mirrors Satan's amorous

recognition of himself in Sin, her moment serves to open up a space within the self, rather than denying the space between the self and another. (38)

Although as I have argued Sin is a character of her own, I cannot deny that her existence is tied up in Satan's narcissism, which differs from Eve's. Sin's birth and her resulting coupling with Satan illustrate Satan's "perverse self-love," as Forsyth puts it, while as Murphy argues Eve's "serves to open up a space within the self." Eve's birth is about herself, and about the potential for her own queer desires. And although Satan and Eve share their self-love, what differentiates them is that Satan forcibly enacts his self-love on his feminine reflection, while Eve is content to just lovingly stare into the eyes of her own. Satan's self-desire is simultaneously procreative and destructive, for it results in both the birth of Sin and the violent ravaging of her body. Eve's self-desire never gets the chance to be procreative, for God redirects her sexual desire to Adam, with whom she will eventually create the rest of humanity. Eve, Satan, and Sin are all tangled together by Eve and Satan's shared self-love and Eve and Sin's shared gender, complicating Milton's treatment of Eve as mother of mankind.

Milton's parallels between Eve and Satan and Eve and Sin complicate Eve's position of "mother of human race," for although Eve's body is not destroyed in the way that Sin's is, the parallels between the two of them are undeniable. Van den Berg writes in "Eve, Sin, and Witchcraft in *Paradise Lost*,"

The learned debates that swirled around accused witches in courtrooms and tracts are crucial to Milton's account of Eve's dream in Books 4 and 5. He borrows the language of the theological treatises and judicial proceedings that probed the moral and ontological status of imagination. All these allusions are constructed to

establish a contrast between Eve and witches that is ultimately based on a fantasy of woman not as seductress but as mother. (351)

Although Eve engages in sex and feels sexual desire quite often in the poem, she is never exactly a “seductress,” for even the lake is the one who does the seducing. Although I won’t delve into van den Berg’s argument specifically in reference to witches, this quotation remains important to my own treatment of Eve and Sin. However I argue that in the poem there is not a simple binary between Eve and Sin/witches, but instead in spite of their differences Eve and Sin are quite similar. Eve goes through a number of transformations in the poem, from a queer and confused newborn, to “mother of human race,” to the fallen woman who dooms her spouse as well, and finally returning to her rightful place as mother of the human race.

It is evident from the differing natures of Eve and Sin’s motherhood that the poem is attempting to create a contrast between the two of them, with Eve as the “good” mother and Sin as the sinful one, but their shared sexualized treatment as women brings them together more than it separates them. In “The Sources of Milton’s Sin Reconsidered,” Catherine Gimelli Martin argues,

More particularly, it also usefully illuminates how and why Eve is *not* like Sin, despite some superficial similarities too often mistaken for identities . . . . Thus while both Sin and Eve apparently possess wifely “attractive graces” (*PL* 2.762, 298), their real differences are revealed as the inevitable barrenness that Sin shares with her “undeliverable” progeny causes a curse, not a blessing, to fall on her seed. (5)

While it is true that Sin's scenes of reproduction are in fact scenes of cannibalism and that after returning to Adam Eve is able to have a procreative relationship, I argue that these differences do not mean that Sin and Eve are ultimately different. While as Martin argues and as I illustrated in Chapter 2 the poem treats Eve as a mother and Sin as a monster, their shared gender and the way their bodies are sexualized and reduced to their reproductive abilities reveals that discussing their similarities is just as fruitful as arguing about their differences.

## VII. CONCLUSIONS

I have spent a lot of time here arguing that queerness exists in *Paradise Lost*, so I would like to finish this thesis by discussing why I feel that such a task is important. The field of literature criticism has long been one that, like *Paradise Lost*, conforms to heteropatriarchal ideals and excludes racial, sexual, and gender minorities. This is why bringing queer theory into literature criticism is so important; even in a text as heterosexual and sexist as *Paradise Lost*, one can find queerness, and so too can one bring queer theory into the preexisting critical tradition. Modern queer critics have been hesitant to view *Paradise Lost* from a queer perspective because on the surface, it is an extremely straight story about the quintessentially heterosexual couple Adam and Eve. Yet as I have illustrated, using queer theory for even such a seemingly straight text as this has yielded new insights while building off of preexisting ones.

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