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The Political Conscience: *Paradise Lost*, Political Allegory, and the Origins of Stanley Fish's "Interpretive Communities"

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A departmental senior thesis submitted to the Department of English at Trinity University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation with departmental honors.

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Stanley Fish's *Surprised by Sin* remains a preeminent work of modern Milton scholarship, and rightly so: it reconciles a formalist reading of *Paradise Lost* with a convincing account of the theological principles Milton intended his poem to convey. Fish calls this hypothesized communication between Milton and the reader "affective stylistics." Affective stylistics offers a phenomenological account of the effects a text's formal qualities have upon a linguistically competent reader. According to Fish, the temptations of *Paradise Lost* educate the Puritan reader by having him "experience" the Fall of Man: the Puritan reader is tempted into misinterpretations that Milton must "correct" through the use of narrative and stylistic strategies, the effects of which engender that reader's self-awareness of his innate depravity—a depravity linked by Milton to his incapacity to reform himself. In Fish's words, "Milton's method is to re-create in the mind of the reader... the drama of the Fall" by persuading the reader to "fall again exactly as Adam did" (1). Given the central place that Fish's affective stylistics occupies in the canon of Milton scholarship, what is most interesting is Fish's later revision of this method. By the middle of his career, with *Is There a Text in This Class?*, Fish leaves behind this phenomenological account of meaning for an approach based on the concept of "interpretive communities," wherein the effects of a text are understood to arise from the interpretive practices of competent, institutional communities of readers, rather than from a single "ideal" reader. In *Is There a Text in This Class?*, Fish relocates the notion of interpretive "competence" from an ideal reader to an ideal interpretive community. One question to ask, given this theoretical shift, would be how *Paradise Lost*, a poem that is both the origin and paragon of Fish's early theoretical aspirations, methodologically preempts affective stylistics as Fish initially conceived it. In other words, how does Milton engage his reader in a way commensurate with the principles of affective stylistics, and yet still accommodate and justify Fish's revised theory of

textual interpretation? If *Paradise Lost*'s methodology of reader engagement exceeds the claims of affective stylistics, as it does in the trajectory of Fish's work both on interpretive theory and on *Paradise Lost*, the argument can then be made that the economy between *Paradise Lost* and affective stylistics is less a *post hoc* theoretical description than a kind of dialogue between poet and critic. I will posit that the consequence of this dialogue is that, in light of *Paradise Lost*'s methodology, Fish's method cannot determine the success of his theory of interpretation while at the same time placing that theory at a critical distance from the poem that originated it. Instead, *Paradise Lost*'s method of reader engagement shows that any reader must consider the poem as having equal stake in determining the success of his or any descriptive apparatus that concerns the affective response of that reader.

In order to reveal this dialogue, principles analogous to those found in both affective stylistics and interpretive communities— phenomenological response and response based on communally imposed interpretive competence, respectively— will have to be located in *Paradise Lost*'s engagement with its “fit” reader. First, I will argue that Milton allegorizes post-Restoration politics through *Paradise Lost*'s theological argument for salvation. The way in which Milton allegorizes politics is important for Fish's claims, I argue, because how Milton achieves a phenomenological response through the strategic employment of shared republican rhetoric is commensurate with the shift in Fish's career from affective stylistics to interpretive communities. I will thus show how Fish is influenced by this political-theological paradigm, leading him to revise his account of intentionality— how authors mean, and the role the reader plays in determining what they mean— to include a general theory of textual interpretation more consonant with the one at work in *Paradise Lost*. Finally, I will argue that *Paradise Lost*, a poem as methodologically complex regarding the act of reading as any contemporary reading of

it, when placed alongside a theory like Fish's that claims to describe Milton's method of engaging his intended reader, in turn has the ability to instigate a critique of any description of that process of reading on a metatheoretical level. This implication is especially important for Fish's revised position because the descriptive processes of a theory claiming to identify the interpretive constraints of Milton's readership can no longer be applied to *Paradise Lost*, as Fish did in *Surprised by Sin*, without raising metatheoretical questions about what it means for a theorist to be a reader of a poem that is about its reader. When a theorist of reader response engages with a poem about readership, what methodological restrictions result? When placed alongside a reader-centered poem, *Surprised by Sin*'s theory of reader-response will always be open to revision in light of new understandings of Milton's reader-directed, theologically and politically concerned narrative of educating his reader. This self-critique eventually leads Fish to base his interpretation of *Paradise Lost* somewhere other than only in the poem or only in the mind of the reader, a space he defines as the norms of "interpretive communities." In order to achieve a clearer picture of this dialogue between poet and theorist, one must explore Milton's own conception of his readership, "fit... though few"; only then will the interpretive constraints the early Fish places upon his competent reader be shown, in light of *Paradise Lost*, to support his move away from this position later in his career (*PL* 7.31).

Admittedly, this exploration of Milton's fit reader will be to a large extent dictated by Fish's initial assumption about *Paradise Lost*, that the experience Milton intends his reader to have defines how successful Milton is in his attempt to "justify the ways of God to men" (1.26). One of the guiding theses of this essay is that only by foregrounding Fish's early assumption about *Paradise Lost* can one talk about "the reader" of *Paradise Lost* at all; only by assuming Fish is correct in identifying the reader as the poem's subject can Milton's "construction" of his

fit reader lend support to Fish's various conceptions over the course of his career of what it is that readers do in general when they interpret texts. Yet "affective stylistics" is a brilliant theoretical apparatus that ventured to answer a simple pragmatic question facing literary studies: what is this text really doing? Before moving on to the main argument of this essay, Fish's early method warrants a closer look because it forms in its basic assumption the importance of the response of the reader, the methodological basis for all of Fish's later work. Fish explains the advantage of his initial assumption by asking what it is that *Paradise Lost* does to its intended readership:

Most poets write for an audience assumed fit. Why is the fitness of Milton's audience a concern of the poem itself? One answer to this question [is]... only by forcing upon his reader an awareness of his limited perspective can Milton provide even a negative intuition of what another would be like; it is a brilliant solution to the impossible demands of his subject, enabling him to avoid the falsification of anthropomorphism and the ineffectiveness of abstraction.
(*Surprised by Sin* 38)

A few phrases stand out here: "negative intuition," "falsification of anthropomorphism," and "ineffectiveness of abstraction." According to Fish, having Milton locate within the reader the true "narrative" of *Paradise Lost*—the story of the fall of the first man, and with him every man after—avoids the pitfalls of making the poem about anything other than man's salvation; any allusions or comparisons to poems (another epic, for instance, such as the *Aeneid*) outside of this theological context are simply fallen lapses of the fit reader's reason, the recognition of which negatively define the true scope of the poem (37-38). The value and novelty of this approach is that it keeps to the text (a kind of loose formalism) while seeking the meaning firmly in the experience of the reader. How then do we best account for Milton's strategy of "negative awareness" in a way that incorporates the existence of communally driven competence? How, in

other words, does Milton appeal to the theological assumptions of his 17th century reader within the formal processes involved in reading *Paradise Lost*?

This task amounts to asking how Milton says what he wants to say without really saying it, and furthermore how he identifies whom he wants to identify without naming them outright. It will be argued in the first section that the vehicle of reader identification is allegory, and that the tenor of this allegory is Milton's republican politics. For Milton, the English republic was a holy enterprise, and there is much evidence that the reader he wanted *Paradise Lost* to address and teach was a fellow republican who, in light of the republic's spectacular failure in the form of the Restoration in 1660, Milton thought had fallen away from the good old cause. However, due to a particularly strict Puritan sensibility, Milton's theological argument cannot risk being about something other than this reader's salvation, even allegorically. As the second section will show, Milton must negate the political argument for the sake of spiritual edification. Sections one and two will show that Milton belongs to the tradition of Christian allegory, but at the same time will argue that Milton is an allegorist who means to end our need of allegory to represent Christian experience; that is, Milton is an allegorist who lays the groundwork for a totalized, immanent vision of Christian existence that, in its immediacy, has no further use for literary representation— what Fish would label Milton's "antiformalism." The third section will address how an emphasis on the communal strategies of interpretation belonging to Milton's fit reader leads to a greater understanding of the grounds for Fish's later theoretical shift. If the reader-oriented account of *Paradise Lost* that follows is largely the product of Fish's career in dialogue with the poem, then such an account will, ideally, help explain the innovations and initial limitations of the career that was its origin.

I. Political Allegory in *Paradise Lost*

If *Paradise Lost* aims to justify the ways of God to men within a Calvinist cosmos that values internal justification (the evidence within oneself of election to receive God's grace) above all else, then this means that Milton must first orient these men to the task. Taken as an address to his "fit" readership, and due to this theological constraint, Milton must consider man singly; God's justice should in the end be written on the heart and not only on the page, a fact which identifies *Paradise Lost* as a poem— an external medium— concerned with the internal spiritual condition of a limited readership, a circumstance which entails two questions. First, how does Milton go about identifying this particular kind of "fit" reader? Second, how does Milton orient this reader to the true task at hand— the reader's indoctrination— without that reader viewing the conclusion of *Paradise Lost* as the task's end, in effect leaving the spiritual task set before mankind behind with the dramatic characterizations of Adam and Eve? The drama of Satan's and mankind's fall is surely one method of engagement, yet it is one much too broad in scope, as it engages all of educated, English Christian society— a society a large part of which, Milton tells us, has revealed itself to be little more than a "barbarous dissonance" (7.32). The proem to Book Seven, in which Milton hopes (aloud to us) to find his "fit audience... though few," suggests an answer to the problem of reader identification; it is in the biographical interpolation (one of many) that Milton references his contemporary circumstance: "I Sing with mortal voice, unchang'd / To hoarse or mute, though fall'n on evil days... / In darkness, and with dangers compast round" (7.24-27). At the time when he published the first edition of *Paradise Lost* in 1667, Milton was both a known radical and regicide, facing the political, religious, and personal consequences of the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, a circumstance he found to be indicative of both a moral and political failure on the part of the English citizenry. Milton, as the

passage indicates, through blind and in considerable danger, stubbornly sticks to the cause, as he says, with “voice, unchanged.”¹ If the one constant amid this religious and political turmoil is Milton’s unchanged voice, committed to the cause of the revolution, then it follows that Milton would have envisioned a reader still committed, competent in a language that he and Milton both speak: that of the short-lived English republic of which they were both a part. Milton engages that reader—a lapsed republican like Milton (in the sense that his politics ultimately failed to be realized), although one not yet lost in the barbarous dissonance— by using this shared, republican language in his poem.² By having his characters speak like republicans, Milton thematizes the fit reader’s path to understanding in *Paradise Lost* through a double sense, the theological being married to the political. It will thus be in how the theological essence of the poem functions as an allegory of the fit reader’s present condition that his reader’s politics comes into play; Milton chooses his reader by making that reader’s contemporary condition a part of the eternal theological argument of *Paradise Lost*.

The practical advantage of this approach is that republicanism acts as a point of common reference, a common and thus more expediently understood language. Yet to look at

¹ There are numerous sources for this standard account of Milton’s situation upon completion of *Paradise Lost*, the most extensive of which is Barbara K. Lewalski’s biography. For the sake of brevity, though, the most concise and to the point is Merritt Y. Hughes’s note to the passage cited above, from *Complete Poems and Major Prose*, 346, note to lines 25-27, citing lines 25-27 (“evil days”) as a direct reference to “the period of reaction against the Puritan revolution after the Stuart Restoration, when for a time Milton’s life is said by his early biographer, John Toland, to have been in some danger.” “Some” may be a bit of an understatement: many of Milton’s associates, no less “guilty” than he, were tortured and executed.

² Fish’s explication of his main argument in *Surprised by Sin* needs to be noted at this time, as it both grounds what follows in this (as well as the next) section’s exploration of the reader’s politics: “(1) the poem’s centre of reference is its reader who is also its subject; (2) Milton’s purpose is to educate the reader to an awareness of his position and responsibilities as fallen man, and to a sense of the distance which separates him from the innocence once his; (3) Milton’s method is to re-create in the mind of the reader (which is, finally, the poem’s scene) the drama of the Fall, to make him fall again exactly as Adam did and with Adam’s troubled clarity, that is to say, ‘not deceived’.” Section one and two of this essay deal with how focusing on the fit reader’s politics illuminates (1) and (2), while revising to some degree the phenomenological claim of (3), having the reader “re-experience” the Fall (1).

republicanism only in this reductive, instrumentalist fashion— as a mere step on the ladder to theological understanding— would not only be to miss Milton’s commitment to both his and his fit reader’s deep ideological commitment to the cause, but to miss as well the poem’s main interpretive apparatus. As seen in the excerpt from the proem, Milton is as much a republican at the time of writing *Paradise Lost* as he has ever been; yet this stance carries with it a co-occurring interpretive commitment. Sharon Achinstein makes an important claim that illuminates how politics and theological understanding are indissolubly linked for Milton; in the period of the Interregnum, the “fit reader of allegory... was to become a partisan reader” who identified with an author “through shared, recognizable political opinions,” as well as through the “shared hermeneutic customs” a shared politics implies (179). Shared opinions, then, open the door for shared interpretive habits. Yet, at this initial stage of Milton’s argument, the linkage of the political opinions of the fit reader to the interpretive acts implicit within another common, theological frame of reference risks subsuming the former under the latter, as *Paradise Lost* makes no other explicit allusion to the status of republicanism in Stuart England. Milton risks leaving the persuasive power of shared, recognizable republican sentiment that would guide the fit reader through *Paradise Lost* almost completely implicit, which in turn risks the fit reader missing the message applicable only to him— a message lost amidst the overwhelming (yet too generalized, because theologically applicable to all men) drama of the Fall.

Why, then, does Milton enact an allegory, the function of which might undermine its very purpose? At the time of the poem’s completion, there were no exhortative external circumstances for Milton to hide his republican sentiment: he was an unapologetic regicide and publicly served the Protectorate,³ and the allegorical literature of the Interregnum period suggests

³ Although totally blind by the end of the revolution, Milton served as “Secretary for Foreign Tongues,” translating back and forth foreign communications for the purposes of forging alliances and legitimizing

no pious reluctance on the part of authors to make overt political points using theological figuration.⁴ This is not to say that Milton thought himself no more pious than the rest—the opposite, I will argue below, seems true. In fact, it is most likely due to Milton’s idiosyncratic piety as well as to his deep commitment to his political ideology that he resorts to his allegorical method. As much as the dangerous political climate of the Restoration, Milton’s antinomianism (which will be explored in greater depth below), his refusal to impose in the form of direct narrative upon his reader’s freedom to choose his own salvation, prevents him from speaking openly about what the fit reader *must* do. In Milton’s experiential Calvinist universe, one verifies election only by internal evidence that should be self-evident. This type of verification, ideally, should not require *Paradise Lost* for guidance (although this will be shown below to be only an ideal). In order to address contemporary political circumstance through theological language, Armand Himy argues that Milton uses both a “language of accommodation,” the theological precept that, while God is unknowable, his communication to man can be understood, and a language of “indirection,” taking advantage of multiple meanings of the obscure, worldly sphere (118). These aspects allow Milton to create a “link between heaven and earth” by which government can be critiqued, while at the same time establish a space where this critique can be achieved through multiple “levels of meaning” (119). Accommodation and indirection show, using Himy’s example, that Satan’s critique of God’s monarchy is patently false, while at the same time still exploring monarchy’s implication in the earthly realm (120).

the English republic to other monarchies. See Martin Dzelzainis’s essay “Milton’s Politics,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Milton*, 82.

⁴ The most conspicuous of royalist tropes, in this respect, was the anti-republican “Parliament of Hell”; see Achinstein, 183, for an analysis of a particularly popular pamphlet: “[i]n *The Devil in His Dumps*, we observe the essential features of the Parliament of Hell genre: there is a topical political aim, as the conventional story of the Devil is applied to a current historical situation.” Thomas H. Luxon also cites the existence at the opposite theological extreme of various “abusers of the scripture” whom the Puritan orthodoxy claimed succumbed to “allegorical fancies” by proclaiming either Charles I, Charles II, or (more perversely, in the case of some radical preachers) they themselves to be Christ incarnate (8).

For Milton, these two critiques are one and the same, in that God's authority "is not a simple political concept," but rather the "prerequisite on which [Christian] ontology is founded"—an ontology, furthermore, in which "the virtue of the subjects remains the fundamental issue" (121). A Christian commonwealth is therefore best suited for this focus on inward virtue and perspicacity; what a commonwealth absent an absolute monarch entails is a conception of government centered on the freedom of the regenerate to "unify" truth, the word of God, "without... knowing exactly how truth may be unified" (127). For Milton, this freedom is best realized in a Christian commonwealth because Christian liberty ultimately ends in the "abrogation of outward law" for that manifested within, available to all who are fit and able to access it (134).⁵ While absolutist about what Christian truth is (yield to the will of God), Milton is categorically "non-monarchical" about the path the individual Christian must take to apprehend it. What this ideological commitment amounts to, then, is that Milton as an authority— even if only a textual one— cannot make evident the path without precluding the ideological commitment to both his theology and politics, and thus to his fit reader, from the very start.⁶

What for Milton begins as a critique of tyranny, then, always ends in the transference of religious authority to the law that is only manifested within. For Milton, this transference means that any outright use of political critique will not only vitiate his antinomian commitment to Christian liberty, in effect imposing his conclusions about republicanism upon the fit reader within a theological narrative with which that reader cannot argue, but will inevitably disconnect the theological implications of his argument from the public sphere Milton intends to critique. A

⁵ The "abrogation of outward law" is thus the essence of Milton's Calvinism.

⁶ See Fish, *How Milton Works*, 500; Fish argues that this kind of commitment to a freedom that is both politically and theologically selfsame stems from Milton's monism as well as his "antinomian epistemology," Milton's "insistence on referring all decisions to the light of the individual conscience rather than to any external measure...."

language of indirection is important because it leaves the reader free to interpret the argument wrongly. When indirection is appended to the precept of accommodation, though, it assures that those who are fit will apprehend the theological message, but with the caveat that the method of engaging the fit reader—Milton’s method of having his reader apprehend the message through politics—cannot impose upon the innate freedom of interpretation to which Milton is equally committed. However, it is how Milton engages the political conscience of his fit reader within these interpretive and ideological strictures (which, for Milton, amount to the same thing) that becomes the main problem; if politics, as the outward guide for the fit reader’s theological orientation cannot be named outright, then it risks being misinterpreted or not interpreted at all, no matter how fit the interpreter.⁷

As mentioned above, in Milton’s political allegory of Christian agency, the political functions as a crucial “guide” for the fit reader’s interpretation of his contemporary theological circumstance. Milton gets around the problem of having the rather amorphous Christian ethic to “be godly” reference a contemporary political circumstance by making the fit reader identify⁸ with the principal characters of *Paradise Lost*. God, Satan, Adam, and Eve, in effect, all speak the same political language as the fit reader. However, this political language exists in two different realms, which, I will argue in the next section, arise from a magnificent feat of chronological ambiguity regarding the local (political) and eternal (theological) sides of Milton’s argument. Both the local/political and eternal/theological are kept just separate enough to influence the path—constructed out of the fit reader’s politics—to ultimate Christian meaning,

⁷ Achinstein names this reluctance to use the overt allegorical mode found in the Parliament of Hell genre as Milton’s resistance to the “satanic practice of allegory, in which there is a one-to-one relation between the political order, the cosmic order, and the representational order”; see “Milton and the Fit Reader: *Paradise Lost* and the Parliament of Hell,” in *Milton and the Revolutionary Reader*, 222.

⁸ “Identification” is used here in the rhetorical sense put forth by Kenneth Burke in *A Rhetoric of Motives*, 20: “[I]nsofar as [two persons’] interests are joined, A is *identified* with B.” Republican speech serves as the locus of joined interests both outside and, as I will show later in this essay, in the poem.

yet not affect the ultimate Christian interpretation of the poem; for Milton, the political must always be subsumed under the theological. David Norbrook supplies an account consonant with this (somewhat maddening) ideological need of Milton to keep things separate yet integrally related; he argues that to properly understand republican literature— that is, poetic narratives not overtly republican although touching on tacit republican themes— one must turn to speech-act theory: “we need to analyze not only [“political” literature’s] cognitive content, considered as timeless truths, but the kinds of ‘illocutionary act’ the author was performing in publishing it” (10). The main “actions” of such speech-acts are allusion and reference. Allusion and reference, in his conception, are processes integral to the problematics of interpretation, as Norbrook explains:

Allusion is a difficult and slippery topic. One critic proposes an upward gradation from appropriation, where a poet may take over a phrase without expecting this to be recognized, through reference, where varying degrees of similarity will be recognized, to allusion, which involves a “miniature hermeneutic dialogue” where difference as well as similarity may be foregrounded. The examples [in *Paradise Lost*], I believe, fall in the second and third categories. (443)

Reference separates itself from allusion in that it is only the first step in recognizing the similarity upon which allusion will build. This account of reference, of finding a similarity between how a politically charged illocution works both in and outside the poem, is then integral to the dialogue of allusion. Theologically derived characters such as those found in *Paradise Lost* perform a political dialogue with the reader by uttering phrases that both sound familiarly republican, leading the fit reader to recognize an allusion to himself, and thus goad him into some kind of action as a result of this identification. According to Norbrook, a particularly good example of this kind of reference that leads to allusion is thematized in Satan’s rebellion, instigated by God’s elevation of his Son. Norbrook contends that the speech-act of God, arbitrarily promoting his Son, places Satan in a position whereby he can react with his own

speech-act that, in its republican reference, is curiously consonant with Milton's own ideals of just rebellion (445). Satan, as a "reader" (or, in this case, misreader) of God, rebels against what he sees as an arbitrary, "private speech-act," and constantly aligns himself with the republican ideal of free public discourse (445). However, Satan uses such speech-acts, as the poem proceeds (in chronological, not narrative time—we see, in a theologically proper fashion, Satan fallen before we see how he falls), to "magnify his personal power" (446). What must be noted at this point is that, within the cosmology of *Paradise Lost* and especially with Satan, republicanism often becomes self-destructive, and it will be seen that it is this self-destructiveness—instigated, though crucially not fulfilled by Satan—which lies at the heart of the poem's wider critique of Christian political agency.⁹ It is in this way that speech-acts, as acts of reference to republican ideology, function in the hermeneutic of allusion.¹⁰ Republican speech-acts create an analogue in the space of the poem representing the state of republicanism in post-Restoration England. In *Paradise Lost*, Satan falls through his use of republican rhetoric, which implies two things: that the fit reader is complicit in the fall of his own ideology, and furthermore that the theological import of *Paradise Lost*'s argument as it relates to Satan's fall shows that salvation is somehow tied to a contest over the use of republican speech. According

⁹ For an exhaustive description of the republican political climate of England in the 1640s and 1650s as well as its connection to Christian morality, see Christopher Hill, *Milton and the English Revolution*, 350: "The English Revolution had gone wrong because the revolutionaries had failed to allow for the resilience and adaptability of the English gentry, their powers of adjustment. The radicals had tried to take political short cuts, had relied on individuals who turned out to be avaricious and ambitious, or hypocrites. The desire for reformation did not sink deeply enough into the consciences of supporters of the Revolution, did not transform their lives. They had passively handed politics over to their leaders, as to some factor. The leaders betrayed the cause, had accepted cowardly compromises, had sacrificed principles to what they thought was economic expediency. Milton was not rejecting the commitment of 1641-5 and 1649-51: he was asking himself why the aims which he had then proclaimed had not been realized. Blame for failures lies not in the aims—which were God's, and remain right—but in the English people, Milton included. Political failure was ultimately moral failure. 'Whose fault' was the Fall, God asked [in *Paradise Lost*]. 'Whose but his own'—Adam's."

¹⁰ By "allusion" Norbrook generally means allusion to Lucan's republicanism in the *Pharsalia*, but the concept of allusion being a "miniature hermeneutic dialogue" will be extended in this essay to include a dialogue with the radical Puritan reader who has experienced the failure of the English republic.

to Milton, how one interprets political rhetoric, which can be used for either good or ill by the speaker or interpreter of such rhetoric, is crucially bound up with how the one understands the Christian cosmos in which one exists.

Complicity is, in this sense, the general method by which *Paradise Lost* shows the republican reader that he is implicated in republicanism's fall, and the ways in which this fall joins with his reception of grace. However, for there to be a personal connection for such a reader, there must be a mediatory space where republicanism can be contested on a human level, because, in the end, Satan is still Satan; if Milton is to supply an account of the earthly republic's failure, that failure must be a human one. Adam and Eve supply this mediatory space, and in this way should be considered both a reference to the fit reader and an allusion to the political struggle with which that reader has been engaged, both politically and, as will be seen, spiritually. The proem to Book Seven, then, in which Milton glosses his political situation, starts in motion a chain of identification for the fit reader that, appropriately, will reach its zenith during the Fall of Man in Book Nine. Milton's placing of these books later on in the narrative of *Paradise Lost* is historically relevant to this process of politically identifying his fit reader; Christopher Hill notes that, judging by the tone and style of books seven through twelve, the later books were almost certainly written after the restoration of the monarchy in 1660 (365).¹¹ It makes sense that after republicanism's cataclysmic failure in England, Milton would want to shift the emphasis more firmly than at first to man's original failure. It will thus be in how Adam and Eve trick themselves into further misusing republican language and reasoning, rather than in how they are first tricked to do so by Satan (who has occupied the majority of Milton's critical

¹¹ See Christopher Hill, *Milton and the English Revolution*, 365: "[t]he invocation to book VII suggests a fresh start, under more difficult circumstances; the conjecture that Books I to VI were written (at least in first draft) before the Restoration, Books VII to XII after it, appears to be borne out by the evidence of style, which links the last six books with *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes* more closely than with the first six books."

zeal up until this point in the poem), that Milton functions in his mode as teacher to his fellow lapsed republican.

However, as the reader's "republican" experience of the Fall happens through an engagement with republican speech-acts, it will be useful to frame this analysis with the difference between prelapsarian and postlapsarian modes of speech. How the prelapsarian Eden is called into question by the incursion of the poem's master speaker, Satan, will still be integral to the functioning of the political allegory; Satan represents, in one character, both the ambiguity of republican speech-acts as well as their effects on the edenic polity, the specious manipulation of whose language leads in large part to the Fall. Satan is crucial to the allegory because he acts as a sustained and yet perverted metaphor for the misinterpretation and misrepresentation of republican ideology, introduced into an Eden unprepared for deviation from literal truth. Eden, in its seemingly perfect state, is not without its "faults" (which must be placed in quotations because these "faults" will play into God's plan for Adam and Eve's own reception of grace) that are to be exploited by Satan. One such fault is the lack of the ambiguity, the presence of which we have already seen in Satan's republican rhetoric. Everything in Eden up until Satan's incursion is not rhetorical¹² in the sense that all meanings are self-evident in the appearance of their signifiers—there are no figural "turns" in the description of edenic life that are needed to persuade the reader that it is edenic (or, for that matter, to persuade Adam and Eve: a conflict

¹² It has been implied, but needs to be explicitly stated, that republican speech-acts are here to be considered as simply another form of rhetoric, as they seek to persuade the fit reader to identify with the characters in the poem; I take this conception from Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic: Poetry, Rhetoric and Politics, 1627-1660*, 11: "It is no accident that speech-act theory should have appealed to historians of republicanism, for it can be seen as a reinvention of rhetoric"; what becomes important is the extra-textual, anti-formal application of poetry in this sense, in that "[a]n approach [to republican literature] through speech-acts points us away from closed systems of thought into dialogue, into the constant invention of arguments and counter-arguments." It must be said, however, that in the case of Milton, even if anti-formal, his system of thought is almost certainly closed in a manner befitting his absolutist theology.

over the perfection of Eden such as the famous separation scene, described in greater detail below, happens well after Satan's incursion into Eden). A passage that illuminates this situation well is Milton's description of Eve's nakedness:

Nor those mysterious parts were conceal'd,
Then was not guilty shame: dishonest shame
Of Nature's works, honor dishonorable,
Sin-bred, how have ye troubl'd all mankind
With shows instead, mere shows of seeming pure (4.312-16)

There are several double meanings at work here to illuminate her unambiguous, "not guilty" nakedness. The first is "concealed," which alludes later to the postlapsarian state, but also carries a much larger import in its absence here: that her "mysterious parts" were not concealed means that they are not mysterious at all at this point in time. What makes those parts mysterious is the "dishonest shame / Of Nature's works" that leads to "mere shows of seeming pure." What is ironic, from this postlapsarian perspective, is that, while the postlapsarian "seeming pure" is ambiguous, Eden's purity is exactly what it seems— we in our postlapsarian mode of understanding are the ones who are unable to conceal the moral shame we created. Milton, as a fallen author, is the one supplying the figural turns in this case, using irony to justify that which needs no justification. The very need to justify nakedness, Milton implies, is evidence enough for man's fallen state, which should ideally alert his fit reader, interpreting the politics of the poem, that the need to justify his politics is, similarly, evidence of fallen reason.

How errancy of meaning is introduced into Eden thus becomes crucial to understanding the culpability of man's degenerate reason in the Fall. Errancy of meaning, within the context of the Fall, it will be seen, happens mainly through the degeneration of the symbolic given into metaphorical ambiguity. A descent into metaphor from an angelic symbol is what distinguishes Satan's self-deceptive use of republican rhetoric from Adam and Eve's. Adam and

Eve, inhabiting a space of latent meaning, must first ascend through metaphor to get to their “symbol”— their proper place in the narrative of Christian history. Satan, in contrast, seeks to further separate himself from this history, an absurd task for the reason that he in large part sets in motion the *beginning* of redemptive Christian history in Eden. The first rhetorical move in this vein actually occurs in Milton’s description of the serpent as it first stands apart from Satan. He speaks of the serpent in allusive, biblical language as having both “wit and native subtlety” (9.93). “Subtlety,” in this sense, carries with it the negative connotation of craftiness that is present in Genesis. Further on, however, Milton subverts this tone by claiming that the serpent, before Satan, was “[n]ot yet in horrid Shade or dismal Den, / Nor nocent yet” (9.185-86). Subtlety now can simply mean a discerning mental faculty as compared to the other animals of the garden. The serpent’s postlapsarian symbolization is a device in which both signifier and signified are coextensive in its interpretation; once the serpent loses its conventional definition due to Satan’s appropriation of it, the result is a fundamental division between what the serpent seems to mean (a harmless denizen of Eden) and what it really means (ungodliness). As Fish would attest, a figural turn such as this is most likely a kind of temptation and correction by Milton, alerting us to the fact that prelapsarian Eden does not yet harbor the multiple meanings of the postlapsarian world. The distinction between signifier and signified occurs through a crucial temporal difference between this scene and the reader’s contemporary, fallen knowledge of how Christian history must unfold: history has not yet begun in Eden, and there are no such absolute, signified meanings upon which to rely. What this ambiguous chronology implies, then, almost counter to how we at first view the lack of ambiguity in Eden, is a place that is best described as having yet to carry full meaning.

It is in taking advantage of the unbeknownst degeneration (or, in edenic time,

generation) into metaphor that Satan as orator beguiles Eve, and thus instigates the Fall of Man. He, in effect, makes his form of the talking snake a specious metaphor for the meaning of the Tree of Knowledge, a metaphor for elevation of status that plays into the desire he, in a previous episode,¹³ unconsciously planted within Eve: “look on mee,” he says, “Mee who have touch’d and tasted, yet both live, / And life more perfect have attain’d” (9.687-89). This characterization by Milton marks all of the negative facets of Satan as a deceptive orator: in his degeneration from Angel into serpent, he degenerates the interpretation of a symbolic given into the interpretation of a metaphorical conundrum where one thing can be another or mean something else, thus perverting the act of communication. When Eve, convinced by Satan’s argument, closes her own final soliloquy before eating by asking “what hinders then / To reach, and feed at once both Body and Mind?” she is ironically alluding to the two aspects of Satan that she failed to perceive as divergent in the correct way: his mind, as it truly is, is a vastly different thing from both the body and mind she perceives it to be (9.778-79). The metaphorical relationship between the serpentine appearance and Satan’s mind allows him enough leeway to gain Eve’s trust in her perception of him.

This episode is, in effect, a disruption of the edenic polity by rhetorical manipulation, introducing into Eden a negative vision of its polity. In this new conception, the role of Satan is to introduce polysemy into Christian history; yet Satan makes use of polysemy in a republican sounding, politically charged way. While it allows him to exploit Eve’s ignorance of multiplied

¹³ See *Paradise Lost*, 4.799-804; 808-9:

him they there found
Squat like a Toad, close at the ear of Eve;
Assaying by his Devilish art to reach
The Organs of her Fancy, and with them forge
Illusions as he list, Phantasms and Dreams....
.....
Vain hopes, vain aims, inordinate desires
Blown up with high conceits ingend’ring pride.

meanings in order to gain her trust in his appearance, his appearance itself becomes an again specious metaphor for the spirit of inquiry necessary for a free discourse, with added antimonarchical sentiment:

if what is evil
 Be real, why not known, since easier shunn'd?
 God therefore cannot hurt ye, and be just;
 Not just, not God; not fear'd then, nor obey'd:
 Your fear itself of Death removes the fear.
 Why then was this forbid? Why but to awe,
 Why but to keep ye low and ignorant... (9.698-704)

In the context of Eden, before now having not encountered ambiguity, the serpent becomes the perfect vehicle for an argument against the monarchy of God: the serpent's edenically self-evident appearance to Eve, by Satan's rhetorical machinations, in effect wrests self-evidence from God's decree and relocates it, dangerously, in the ambiguous, worldly discourse of Eden. The "fear of Death" that at once "removes the fear" is an act of reasoning entirely internal to Eden, a place that is now distanced from God in an implicit plea for free inquiry. Of course, this temptation is based entirely upon a tautology: free inquiry is the very condition of Eve's being tempted and is therefore not something she lacks; Satan makes a redundancy seem a revelation. This is the point where Milton's antinomian Calvinism shows itself: the evidence of one's salvation is internal, but if one is to be free, one must be free to fall, which in Eve's case consists of a freedom to ignore what is written on the heart in favor of what is spoken aloud in the public sphere of republican illocution. What comprises Satan's republican temptation is a device that distances Eve from the Calvinist intuition of the good that, when married to the faculty of reason that marks such intuition as virtuous, should be self-evident.

In the end, Satan exploits Eve's ignorance of herself. Milton has Satan use republican rhetoric to highlight an essential danger of republicanism: that in the pursuit of a freer

status as a citizen, in the discourse that is involved in trying to figure out an expedient device for gaining freedom, one can actually diminish knowledge about oneself and one's proper role in a Christian polity. As Norbrook notes, in Satan's persuasion of Eve "what he really offers [her] is a diminution... a narrow perspective that loses sight of the cosmic common interest," which manifests itself in the argument that until now has remained implicit: if the polity falls away from God, that polity is no longer a true polity at all and cannot hope to reconcile the internecine conflicts that inevitably, disastrously in the case of the English Civil War, result (485). When applied to republicanism's failure in England, the message is clear: "we were not godly enough." What Norbrook terms "the pragmatics of communication" in *Paradise Lost* has been successfully co-opted by Satan due to the problematic condition of language in Eden: its susceptibility to rhetorical incursion and deception under the guise of republican sentiment (485). Eve's "diminution" is Satan's greatest success, and he succeeds through his use of republican rhetoric, of how he persuades Eve to be a republican in the term's most restrictive sense. Republicanism, in this form, simply means a plea for freedom without taking into account the antinomian responsibility for one's salvation that necessarily attends this plea. The republican dictum of political freedom, for Milton, must always be thought out cosmically, the part considered from the vantage point of the whole. How Eve falls then becomes a function of the rhetorical ambiguity that Satan not only uses to seduce Eve, but seduces Eve to use for the purpose of her own argument for personal freedom. It is a self-deception rooted in Satan's initial republican presupposition: that hierarchy is in all cases a bad thing, a universal evil, which is of course false regarding the cosmology of the Christian universe, where hierarchy is the justifiable rule (489). Eve's fall reveals itself to be of the same kind as Satan's, happening through the misapplication of republican rhetoric that results from ambition, pride, and self-service.

The fit reader, then, is given a narrative whereby both sin and the fall of the English republic are rendered coextensive in the deceptive use of republican rhetoric— rhetoric being, as Norbrook's claims, *Paradise Lost's* shorthand for its speech-acts— and thus an indicator to the fit reader of his complicity. The republican speech-acts in *Paradise Lost* that eventuate the allusions to England's moral failure as a republic now constitute the true nature of the political allegory: the hard truth is that the English republic fell in large part because of republicanism and because of republicans. Through reading *Paradise Lost*, the fit reader's identification with its republican characters removes him step by step from the proximity to the Paradise once known and to which he spiritually aspires. Theology, however, is far from being incommensurate with politics: it must be kept in mind that Milton stays true to the cause. But for a *Christian* commonwealth to function, the cause must be one that takes into account the larger, godly sphere in which the republic must exist, as Hill explains:

The true fight is fought first in the hearts of men. When that is won, no external enemies will remain to overcome. War therefore, so far from being glorious, defeats its own ends because it produces the wrong virtues. True glory comes from the renunciation of glory.... *Paradise Lost* was not the glorification of the chosen nation that Milton had at one time envisaged, but it was still 'doctrinal and exemplary to a nation'. By helping to discover where God's cause had been misinterpreted, it might lead to a recovery of hope and the prospect of more effective action in the future. (364)

Each speech-act that references the republic is thus one that is always and already fallen, simply because it ignores the "true fight." If the hearts of men are not properly oriented to the task, then the fight, whether just revolution or the fight for one's soul (which, again, for Milton are selfsame), will inevitably eventuate exactly the wrong virtues that Satan best represents. If the fit reader does not understand this situation by the time of the Fall in *Paradise Lost*, he is essentially back where he began: enthralled by the republican Satan of the earlier books, having made no progress beyond his dim political aspirations. Republicanism, then, as a theological

guide, is not meant to abrogate or negate itself, but rather to show its efficacy only when considered within the scope of the world to come; Milton means for republicanism in *Paradise Lost* to highlight the importance of the proper relationship between the two worlds in light of which republicanism must be considered — the City of Man and the City of God. The rhetoric of republicanism, in light of how it persuades the fit reader to see himself as complicit in the fall of both man and nation, will show the path out of its own failure through the theological principles with which, for Milton, a properly conceived politics— in which the City of Man is always judged by its standing in relation to the City of God— always lies attendant.

II. Political Allegory and Milton's Theology

The method Milton uses in Book Nine of *Paradise Lost* to identify his chosen audience, however, is a crucial problem for the poet. Milton cannot abide leaving allegory in a state in which it could be interpreted as political *per se*; given Milton's monistic imagining of the Christian cosmos, the theological and the political cannot in good faith be separated. Yet there also exists a fundamental reason why they should at least be considered as two very distinct facets of the Miltonic cosmos. The anxiety over expressing theological truth exists for Milton from the moment he expresses anything about the matter, implying that once divine truth is made public, it risks becoming misconstrued in the earthly marketplace of ideas. This possibility should be worrisome for Milton, as his antinomianism cannot abide misinterpretation being restrained or forcefully corrected simply because such acts would impinge upon the freedom of choice that he so clearly thematizes in the drama of his main characters; God's plan, while it cannot go awry, can be vastly depreciated under the guise of republican speech. One can see this

anxiety¹⁴ at work in the proem to Book Three, where Milton asks, invoking Holy Light, “[m]ay I express thee unblamed?” (3.3). However, he quickly shifts tenses back to the third person and (addressing the reader and/or himself) adds “since God is Light, / And never but in unapproached Light / Dwelt from Eternity” (3.3-5). According to Milton, while God is the source of free will and of the moral law that must be observed, he himself is an integer; he may exist in all created substance, yet creatures arising from that substance must by rule not be forced to understand him, or by the same logic be forced to understand themselves. As God puts it in *Paradise Lost*: “[Adam] had of mee / All he could have,” yet “[n]ot free, what proof... / Of true allegiance...?” (3.97-98; 103-4). But is having God speak, to be expressed by Milton, blameworthy and hypocritical on Milton’s part, who in his prophetic role aims to be the Puritan exemplar? More importantly, does this possibility of blameworthiness call into question his role as a teacher to the fit reader? Yes and no. Yes, in that expressing God is indicative of the spiritual dearth of the postlapsarian subject, Milton included. No, in the sense that all such subjects are equally blameworthy before the fact, Milton again included. He is not hypocritical because he is human, and he is not blameworthy because he recognizes he is always and already blameworthy— at least insofar as he does not transgress the spiritual boundaries the proem implies. The problem lies in the fact that, while Milton answers himself “yes,” by doing so he implies a division from the fit reader not unlike the division of all from God, if not in substance then in understanding; Milton is completely sure about his blameworthiness, and thus in the context of what Fish terms Milton’s “antinomian epistemology” presents himself as having the special self-knowledge

¹⁴ I take this idea of Puritan concern over representing God from Thomas Luxon’s *Literal Figures: Puritan Allegory and the Reformation Crisis in Representation*, 4: “With this doctrinal privileging of experience over notions, Protestant and Puritan preachers encouraged their flock to so experience the Word in Scripture that they might say, “Jesus Christ... was never more real and apparent then now”.... God is everywhere represented in his creation, especially in “man,” but our ontological realm and God’s remain as distinct from each other as figure and thing figured....”

characteristic of the Calvinist elect (*How Milton Works* 500).¹⁵ Thomas Sloane terms this special stature Milton's "prophetic *ethos*," a rhetorical position neither divine nor "personalist," an *ethos* one is tempted to elevate above the worldly, political sphere in which it must, as all rhetorical flourishes must, exist (214). Yet a prophetic *ethos* risks alienating the Puritan reader from it; having that reader succumb to temptation by his higher argument, effectively reducing him to a state of incapacity, Milton's role as a specialist in interpreting God's plan for England is thus not a strictly *persuasive*¹⁶ *ethos* at all.

This distancing is in fact the first of many in Book Three designed to restrict the fit reader's identification with Milton. In light of this, how does Milton, if not by persuasion, teach the fit reader? Thomas Sloane provides a cogent argument for how Milton goes about solving this problem. In his chapter on "Miltonic form," Sloane perceives that in *Paradise Lost* there exists not "two alternatives," as in the humanist disputative rhetoric of *controversia*, but rather the singular possibility of Christian truth arrived at through *dispositio*, the formalistic act of organizing one's argument so as to make truth available (213-215). Eternal truth, in other words, is not a matter of rhetorical persuasion or controversial argument where each side has equal say, but of revealing truth as it already exists by arranging the argument according to the logical

¹⁵ See Stephen M. Fallon's analysis of Milton's "aristocratic" tensions in his reading of Arminius, from "'Elect Above the Rest': Theology as Self-Representation in Milton" in *Milton and Heresy*, 107: "Given Milton's general argument concerning the centrality of the free acceptance of grace in election, it would be essential for faith to be freely chosen rather than made inevitable by a divinely given predisposition, for the same reason that any predisposition to sin would compromise the freedom of Adam and Eve, and hence the theodicy of *Paradise Lost*. But in this passage [from Milton's *Christian Doctrine* concerning divine image] Milton flirts with just such inborn predispositions.... Milton has worked himself into a position in which election is tied to what might be an inborn virtue, or at least a healthy allotment of the 'traces of the divine image.'"; and 110, that this tension is central to Milton's "self-construction as a heroic and select servant of God."

¹⁶ See note 8. The conception of persuasiveness as commonality I take from Kenneth Burke's notion of "identification" mentioned above.

dictums of truth itself.¹⁷ Milton makes it clear that humans are not privy to this truth to the same extent as God or his angels when he has Raphael answer Adam's question about how Heaven is different than Earth, directing his answer toward the concept of reason: "Discursive, or Intuitive; discourse / Is ofttest yours, the latter most is ours, / Differing but in degree, of kind the same" (5.488-490). Sloane contends that this passage exemplifies Milton's understanding of intuition in its Latinate, "formal" meaning of *intueor*: "to gaze at, to contemplate" (230). In a Calvinist universe, intuition is not something that humans lack; it simply exists in us to a different (and, after the Fall, much lesser) degree (230). It is important to note that the elevation for which Eve wishes in Book Nine is not foreclosed upon. A human can in principle be raised to angelic "perfection": "time may come when men / With Angels may participate" (5.493-94). However, by this action, Milton restricts the higher argument of the poem to a revelation that is "conceptual" rather than rhetorical, in that the poem uses "form as a mode of thought" to convey its argument, rather than emotional effect (214). Milton, rather than appealing emotionally to fallen humanity, is more concerned with "training" fallen reason through a carefully laid-out argument, of lessening that degree of difference between human and angelic reason (230). In the end, Sloane shows that there is a fundamental certitude lying at the heart of Milton's post-humanist, Christian argument. Milton the Puritan cannot abandon the eternal form, or *dispositio*

¹⁷ Milton's Ramism is essential here, and is best explained by Sloane himself in *Donne, Milton, and the End of Humanist Rhetoric*, 220: "All Ramist Logic assumes that the mind naturally assents to truth, that truth has only to be presented, not argued for or explained. Earlier it was suggested that this epistemology is stoic. If it is *also* a prophetic epistemology, it does not quite fit the nature of *Miltonic* prophecy.... Nonetheless, however unlike the Ramists and stoics Milton seems on some scores, he does share with them an epistemological belief that knowledge is *impersonal* and that the persuasive force of its truthfulness lies in its proper framing, configuration, or *form*." A good example of what differentiates Milton's Ramism can be found in Sloane's "Rhetorical Selfhood in Erasmus and Milton," 125: "no understanding is available through image alone or without the Spirit, the Light, and judgment that make understanding possible— or, for that matter, that make the poem possible." Miltonic form is something that does not persuade the reader in a personal manner, but rather acts impersonally through formal arrangement to reveal truth that is already present and, when arranged properly, self-evident.

(the “locution”), of his argument; its “purely theological” interpretation never risks being overwhelmed by its implied political argument. In light of the fact that Milton’s prophetic self does *not* speak to an audience as equally elect as he and therefore does not have the same intuitive capability, Milton’s argument continues to foreclose on the options he has to disseminate it.

One must now look closely at what is implied by Milton’s question, “may I express thee unblamed?” Immediately after he asks if he can remain unblamed, Milton appeals to a God that has dwelt in, in fact has been, Holy Light for all eternity. To find the solution to Milton’s problem of teaching, then, one must consider how Milton balances two different levels of chronology in the poem while speaking in one epic voice. Eternal, theological time coexists in the poem with contemporary political time through Milton’s use of republican speech-acts, spoken by theological characters that reference the fit reader’s contemporary politics. In just the same way that locution and illocution exist in the same utterance, *dispositio*—the eternal argument— and *controversia*, as seen in the local rhetorical sphere of Eden, coexist in *Paradise Lost*, if only in different planes of argumentative existence. Sloane’s claim for Miltonic certainty, while unarguably correct, is a result of the epistemological restriction of the postlapsarian cosmos; there are simply no more options left than to wait for the Second Coming. However, as seen above in the analysis of Eve’s temptation, rhetorical temptation grounds the Fall, the scene of action that must allow for human failure, defined by a susceptibility to deceptive, controversial argument. Humanity after the Fall is arrantly discursive rather than intuitive in nature, confirming Raphael’s observation of human reason. In light of the discursive nature of man and due to the way in which Milton distances himself, how Milton identifies his fit reader as fallen must still be through rhetorical engagement. The less rigid political allegory

explored in the previous section then is, somewhat paradoxically, prelapsarian; those who can be humanly identified with (Adam and Eve) are allowed to *seem*— both to us and to themselves— free to interpret so as to freely choose their fall. The political and the theological, while existing together in the utterances of the poem, each thematize the problems of the other; Eden highlights the rhetorical nature of republican political engagement, while the English republic makes evident the ineluctability of the Fall. The question must now be asked: why does Milton see fit to use the theological in terms of the political and rhetorical, and the political in terms of the certain theological “form” of Christian history?

The answer lies partly in the fact that the failure of republicanism is an earthly, provisional analogue to the Fall, a contemporary *felix culpa* of which the fit reader is a part— and rhetoric is an inescapable operator in republican discourse. Victoria Kahn notes that in the early modern period the political contract— a central aspect of republican political theory— existed in a state of transition, wherein “God was still the creator of the world, but man was the proximate creator of value by virtue of his voluntary social and political arrangements” (129). Yet “voluntary” here, a concept also essential to Milton’s theodicy, “emphasizes the creative role of speech-acts and the constitutive power of language in shaping new rights and obligations” (129). An emphasis then on the “rhetorical dimension of [the] social and political contract,” the fact that eloquence sustains agreement, is necessary to reveal how Milton engages his fit reader; volition is a property essential to both earthly and spiritual maneuvering, on or off the right path (137). As we have seen in Book Nine, Eve succumbs to a type of “contract” with Satan. It makes sense that Milton would engage his fit reader through a similar method: the sustaining of a kind of tacit interpretive agreement through the flawed, rhetorically-capable characters who work towards their fall, who utter the speech-acts necessary for that reader’s factional alignment. It is

for this purpose that the political allegory must be sustained. It is here also where Milton's chronological ambiguity becomes essential; man's obligation to God is theologically foundational and absolute in prelapsarian time, yet this foundation is, ironically, grounded by the necessity of a postlapsarian linguistic agreement between Milton and his reader. Not unlike how God's speech in Book Three grounds the fictionalized Fall, Milton's linguistic agreement with his fit reader—the republican language that they both share— shows itself to be the methodological, worldly, material framework behind Milton's more ethereal and abstract theological argument: that of calling attention to the fit reader's fallenness and, more importantly, teaching a greater awareness of the Calvinistic, inner "Holy Light."¹⁸

Yet Milton's larger purpose of Christian teaching, again, cannot risk being overshadowed by this political method of engaging his fit audience. The fact that the English republic is thematized through Satan, Adam, and Eve's republican language should indicate to the reader that something has gone awry. By the time the reader realizes that this method of engagement is necessary to comprehend his position in the narrative of Christian history, he would at the same time realize (in a similar fashion to Milton's indictment of the audience through the justification of Eve's nakedness, seen above) the paucity of his own solitary Inner Light; the fact that such a reader needs an earthly argument is indicative of his bondage to the material, public world. That this mode of identification arises through the republican, performative rhetoric of Satan is still a singularly important event in the poem, but now in a way that can no longer be viewed as

¹⁸ I believe this is how Milton gets around his distancing authorial presence and its attendant certainty to present his *ethos* on a more "human" level to the fit reader; see William J. Kennedy's *Rhetorical Norms in Renaissance Literature*, pg. 173: "Significantly, while the speaker embraces his role as recipient of the muses' aid [referring to Milton's invocation of the Holy Spirit as an epic trope] he also embraces it as an audience who gives full witness to the events vouchsafed him by the muses. Here he functions as something more than a mere agent who records the narrative action. He becomes an interpreter of the action...." It is in this last sense that Milton "interprets" events in a republican light, the same way as the fit reader.

ambiguous. Something then happens of the kind that leads Angus Fletcher to conclude that allegory “is not so much written *in* a fog of compulsion as it is written *about* the fog of compulsion” (341). In other words, allegory thematizes the problems of its own interpretation, and nowhere is this more prominent than in Book Nine read in conjunction with the proem to Book Three (341). How Milton seeks to express God and still remain unblamed lies in direct correlation to how republican language is used in Book Nine, specifically in how God’s and Satan’s speeches are only superficially alike in their use of republican rhetoric. To achieve this correlation, Milton must transcend allegory’s problematizing of its own interpretation, and Book Three functions to this effect: it is the thematization of an eternal contract, always and (literally in the poem) already happening before the seduction found in Book Nine. It is no accident that one can compare Satan’s specious linguistic agreements with Eve to God’s contractual-sounding reasoning found in his monologue in Book Three. Both evoke the divine contract between God and mankind; Satan in order to undermine it, God in order to justify it:

Authors to themselves in all
 Both what they judge and what they choose; for so
 I form’d them free, and free they must remain,
 Till they enthrall themselves: I must change
 Thir nature, and revoke the high Decree
 Unchangeable, Eternal, which ordain’d
 Thir freedom: they themselves ordain’d thir fall. (3.122-28)

However, God’s linguistic agreement differs in one fundamental way from Satan’s: it is not “linguistic,” at least not in the fallen sense of Satan or man. Instead, it is a perfect ontological speech-act,¹⁹ in that humans are the substantial manifestations of the Word (just as we inherit

¹⁹ While having explored speech-act theory as argued by Norbrook and Kahn, I take the idea of attributing it to God’s speech from Ken Simpson’s “Rhetoric and Revelation: Milton’s Use of *Sermo* in *De Doctrina Christiana*,” 341: “The generation, or more precisely, the creation of the Word within the limits of time following God’s internal decree is the logical consequence of Milton’s construction of revelation as a speech-act, the Word emerging from the silent presence of God’s fullness.” In *Paradise Lost*, Milton cannot have God be a “silent presence” and then have Christ (or Adam and Eve) simply

divine intuitiveness, we inherit divine substance, both of which for Milton are to a large degree selfsame). We are therefore the sign of the fidelity of God, in that simply by existing freely we already show that God has upheld his end of the bargain; he “ordains” our freedom, while we “ordain” our ability to “enthrall ourselves” and subsequently fall.²⁰

The Fall—specifically the republican language that caused it— then creates the allegorical space which enthralls the fit reader by rhetorical identification. As shown in Book Nine, Eden manifests the rhetorical, public nature of the world; however, by the negation of our part in the divine contract to which God’s speech alludes, we distance rhetoric from the divine and thus place it firmly in that of the postlapsarian, earthly sphere. The allegory still functions in a one-to-one relationship, where republican speech refers to Milton’s antinomian theological epistemology, yet now in a way that shows the two to be a misalignment; as Sloane suggests, fallen discourse abounds while intuition— that kind made so evident by the certainty of both Milton’s epic voice and God’s speech— becomes more and more opaque.²¹ The only recourse left for the fit reader to reclaim certainty is to look for the answer in the spiritual plane.

However, the only way to achieve this is to look at God’s “oath” in his creation of man as fallen.

While God has the foreknowledge to correctly judge human history, humans will have to live it

emerge, at least in a narrative sense, from nothing. This situation would likely risk misinterpretation in the postlapsarian world. Again, as Sloane notes, the parts of the argument must accord best with truth, and the truth for Milton is that God is omnipresent. However, in a world fallen away from God this Ramist dictum, I believe, necessitates the fact that the “republican” linguistic agreement of Milton and fit reader grounds the theology of *Paradise Lost*.

²⁰ See Victoria Kahn, “Rhetoric, Rights, and Contract Theory,” 132. I believe Milton, a reader of the early modern contract theorist Hugo Grotius, is attributing to God Grotius’ reading of Ciceronian “fidelity”: “people do not keep oaths out of fear of divine retribution but rather out of an awareness that keeping oaths itself creates justice... the oath is not only a sign of fidelity, but also its cause.” Reading God’s speech as a speech-act allows one to see what Milton is saying about the special divine status of God’s speech as opposed to that which occurs (often speciously) on Earth (both inside and outside the poem): it is a physical, ontological manifestation of Cicero’s idea of the oath (the creation of humans) being the cause of fidelity (God’s justness). Milton, in effect, puts God back into the argument, but in a way substantially different from and characteristically modern in relation to the medieval conception of “divine retribution.”

²¹ *Ibid.*, note 14.

in order to do the same; this is the predicament of the fit reader, who has lived the political experience Book Nine thematizes. It is only now that Milton's Eden reveals itself for what it is: a mediatory space, a space of transition from a worldly and rhetorical argument to one that is transcendent and self-evident. Eden may manifest the rhetorical, public nature of the world, yet by the negation of this mimetic function Eden contains the potential for the solitary, intuitive, non-rhetorically apprehended truth; in this sense it must function allegorically in both the worldly and transcendent planes. Through their actions in the Fall, Adam and Eve are "republican," in that such actions rely upon a publicly-determined discourse of identification (with each other, Satan, or the fit reader himself). Yet the ultimate meaning of these actions can only be realized in a history that is self-evident: the continuing Christian narrative of which the English republic is only a part and can thus serve only one end—the transcendent argument for God's justness, who is just insofar as he is shown to elect the fit reader to receive grace. As the certainty that pervades God's "preface" to the Fall in Book Three intimates, there has only been one option all along, only now the fit reader has been made aware of this theological issue in a way that negates the worldly, republican sphere of the Fall, returning him to the solitary, Calvinist self-scrutiny that is the aim and consequence of Milton's apposing the local and the eternal. The English republic, as thematized in the Fall, has been the allegorized public space of this issue, the space of ambiguous persuasion that is now nullified by having its wider meaning—the identification of the fit reader's worldly errancy—solidified and internalized by the Ramist-inspired argumentative mechanism of allegory that is itself worldly and errant.

Milton's grand design, then, has been to *show* the fit reader, rather than force or persuade him to see, the way from external, worldly, political experience to the internal and spiritual Inner Light by means of a worldly, postlapsarian language that that reader can understand. Like

Milton's anxious representation of God as a speaking character, his fit reader must be parsed in just the same "physical" sense, in that Milton imagines him as occupying a sphere of speech and action; the Inner Light, like its heavenly source, as Luxon would point out, cannot "exist" in the world, even if thematized in a poem, without succumbing to the kind of debased allegorical representation now deemed necessary.²² It is worth returning to Hill's statements mentioned in the previous section, that for Milton "true glory comes from the renunciation of glory," and that "*Paradise Lost* was not the glorification of the chosen nation that Milton had at one time envisaged, but it was still 'doctrinal and exemplary to a nation.'" The renunciation of glory is, in the sense outlined above, the renunciation of republicanism *as a goal in itself*, while what is "doctrinal and exemplary" to a nation is the way to truth, allegorized for his fit reader as the "political" (because public) process of renouncing a debased politics. According to Hill, *Paradise Lost* revises Milton's position as a radical revolutionary in a way that allows him to still stay true to the cause. If the hearts of men are not properly oriented to the task, then the unneeded fight that results will inevitably result in exactly the wrong virtues that Satan represents; pride comes before the Fall because it represents the ability to externalize blame, which is the mistake Adam ultimately makes in Book Twelve, well after the Fall. After Michael speaks of the coming of Christ, Adam implores him to "say... / what stroke [of Christ] shall bruise [Satan's] heel," to which Michael replies with a warning:

Dream not of thir fight,
As of a Duel, or the local wounds
Of head or heel...

.....

²² See Luxon, *Literal Figures*, 3-4: he notes the existence of a "contradiction between Puritanism's homiletic encouragement of an 'experimental' rather than merely 'notional' understanding of and relationship to the Word incarnate and its commitment to a two-world dualistic ontology according to which the experience of the body in this world is, at worst, wholly to be despised, and, at best, an allegorical shell whose temporal blessings are no more than a dim figure of the eternal blessings of the world to come."

thy Savior, shall recure,
 Not by destroying *Satan*, but his works
 In thee and thy Seed (12.385-87; 393-95)

These lines spoken by Michael would constitute for the fit reader a dichotomy between the external history that Michael narrates for Adam and the interior orientation of the individual Christian. As we have seen with Eve, the enemy is firmly planted within oneself, in the ability to misuse language and reason or, as Hill notes, to misinterpret “God’s cause”—Satan only exploits this tendency, and therefore, in a brilliant move of diminishment by Milton, is proven to be largely incidental (364). Like glory, victory is truly victorious only when it renounces victory, and this renunciation can only happen within. True to the Christian ethic, something must be sacrificed for salvation to be enacted, and for Milton this is, to a qualified degree, the English republic itself; in the scheme of *Paradise Lost*’s political argument, the fit reader must sacrifice is his urge to idolize the English republic as a goal in and of itself. Instead, he must see republican politics as an external manifestation of the correct internal, Christian dispositions of the English citizens. *Paradise Lost* is not so much a document of republican aspirations and failures as it is a guide for Christian interpretation that uses the failure of republicanism, for Milton a sin on the part of the nation, as the most the most practical route toward the reader’s theological understanding of his depraved status. In short, the allegory has switched positions: the true allegory, in Milton’s Christian universe, is in fact the English republic; it is an allegory that by its own negation teaches awareness of its theological frame.²³ The ideal of a Christian republic, that of being able to reach freely one’s individual spiritual potential, is only the worldly

²³ I take this conception of the absolute theological frame as a formal device that negates traditional rhetoric— and with it traditional allegory— from Thomas Sloane, *Donne, Milton, and the End of Humanist Rhetoric*, 220: “[Milton] does share with [Ramists] an epistemological belief that knowledge is *impersonal* and that the persuasive force of its truthfulness lies in its proper framing, configuration, or *form*.” For the full passage, see note 17 above.

and, for lack of a better term, “poetic” approximation of that which has yet to be attained in the postlapsarian world: the re-erection of the City of God.

Milton is able to get away with this type of political grounding for the service of his higher argument due to one central argumentative tactic, which concerns what Fish identifies as Milton’s monism combined with his “antinomian epistemology”:

The key [to reconciling Milton’s politics and theology] is to recognize the relationship between his absolutism— his monism— and his epistemology, which is radically antinomian. That is to say, Milton’s antiformalism, his refusal to identify truth with any of its local and temporary instantiations, his insistence on referring all decisions to the light of the individual conscience rather than to any external measure or prepackaged formula, precludes him from laying down the law even though he preaches the necessity of conforming to it. (*How Milton Works* 500)

What Fish terms Milton’s “antiformalism,”²⁴ in light of political allegory, is simply the act of “referring to the light of the individual conscience” of Milton’s ideal, fit reader. However, the fact of the matter remains that Milton addresses this reader through the “external measure” of republican figuration, and, due to Milton’s monism, this type of measure cannot avoid being read as “laying down the law” simply because republicanism is only one of many physical manifestations, each potentially divine, that exist within a Christian cosmos.

Daniel Shore, in his exploration of Milton as “iconoclast,” suggests a way to reconcile Milton’s allegorical mode in a way more fitting to his theological strictures. He shows why seeing republicanism as a prepackaged interpretive formula, a simple external manifestation of

²⁴ “Antiformalism” would ostensibly contradict what I interpret to be Milton’s use of form (see previous note). However, I take Fish to mean the *earthly*, time-bound instantiations of truth, whereas “Miltonic form,” I believe, is essentially only that which to a large extent negates the primacy of local truth, even when it is a necessary part of the rhetorical engagement that leads to “conforming to the law.” Milton teaches there is one eternal form of truth, but, as Fish says, in the postlapsarian cosmos we only have access to it through its local instantiations. Fish’s affective stylistics could be important here; the fact that readers perceive a text through a “temporal-spatial consciousness” means that the political allegory, having simply already occurred in experience of the reader being engaged, cannot entirely be negated. See “Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics,” 29.

Christian intuition, is too simplistic an account of Milton's republicanism, especially in light of the seductive theological service, the readerly *felix culpa*, it performs in *Paradise Lost*. Shore argues that Milton's ambiguous use of *controversia* "disseminates [the idol] it aims to refute," the idol here being the English republic that makes up the precarious center of Milton's theological argument—the basis on which the postlapsarian linguistic agreement with the fit reader is founded (25). From this, Shore concludes that Milton's iconoclasm in *Paradise Lost* is "epicritical" (which he defines as "to pass judgment on"), *epicrisis* being "largely the product of the conditions of *controversia*: one must quote in order to refute" (27). Milton leaves intact "idols such as Mulciber, Belial, and Satan at the height of their aesthetic and rhetorical appeal" only to place "behind this force the whole of his poetic care," defined as the "capacity for resistance" that Milton's epicritical mode, by its passive distance from these idols, imbues in his reader (34). Michael's correction of Adam's mistake, in this sense, is an epicritical one, in which Milton criticizes how Adam idolizes an external fight between good and evil. This tactic has the added benefit that it precludes temptation and thus *shows* the way, avoiding the *controversia* of the rhetorical center, which I argue is, to some degree, necessary for Milton's argument.

In light of Shore's insights, the argument for political allegory giving way to theological truth by way of controversial temptation seems at an impasse. Yet, in this sense, *epicrisis*, being a rhetorical function of Milton's "showing the way," should be considered part of what Sloane conceives as *dispositio*, the formalistic act that allows Milton to "show us how to read the entire poem... from the perspective of the poet, the creator" (213). As I have shown, this mode of *dispositio*, that of the perspective of the eternal argument (of which Milton thematizes himself to be a part), is just simply that—eternal. Milton cannot be an iconoclast—even in Shore's idiosyncratic sense of the term—regarding republicanism because republicanism is both time-

bound and part of the contemporary makeup of the reader he hopes to persuade to intuit spiritual meaning; it is evidence of a “local instantiation” meant to seduce the fit reader into falling by having him speak the same language as Adam and Eve. The English republic, then, occupies the same problematic, rhetorical status as Eden in the poem: that of the necessary, external, local circumstance that must be forsaken in order for paradise to be realized explicitly, as Hill crucially notes, “within the hearts of men” (364). Michael, who arrives at Eden after the Fall and at the beginning of the postlapsarian interpretive climate, says as much to Adam. He adds to his rebuke a note of hope, observing that after the debacle of the Fall and with a mind set right (essentially listing the qualities of a good Puritan, made possible by the Fall²⁵) “then wilt thou not be loath / To leave this Paradise, but shalt possess / A paradise within thee, happier far” (12.585-87). In short, Milton must teach through implication if he is to avoid constraining his antinomian epistemological commitment that he finds so essential in regaining the “paradise within.” This realization must happen through a partial negation of republican speech which implies the theological argument; “partial” because seeing republicanism in light of such a higher argument is not only essential to the fit reader’s engagement, and is thus to some extent, as Shore suggests, a preservation of what is (in this case, provisionally) opposed, but is further evidence that republicanism can exist without necessarily becoming debased as “idolatry” as it had during the English republic (25).

Milton still, though, cannot determine the path or “lay down the law,” as Fish puts it, which is important here because “laying down the law” is a facet that Gordon Teskey shows to

²⁵ See *Paradise Lost*, 12.581-85:

only add
Deeds to thy knowledge answerable, add Faith,
Add Virtue, Patience, Temperance, add Love,
By name to come call’d Charity, the soul
Of all the rest: then wilt thou not be loath
To leave this Paradise...

be quite pervasive in traditional allegory.²⁶ How Milton diverts from traditional allegory, where one thing determinately references another, is then of the utmost importance for seeing why only the *partial* negation of this function should occur. Citing Fish, Teskey observes that, rather than becoming “entangled” in narrative, the reader of *Paradise Lost* becomes entangled in the “rhetoric of sin” (10). This action, according to Teskey, however, is fundamentally non-allegorical. For Teskey, Milton’s foil is Spenser, who he defines as allegorical for precisely the reason listed above: he literally “lays down the law” through narrative action (9). Milton, on the other hand, is “dialectical,” since error in *Paradise Lost* “turns on one catastrophic act of negation” happening through choice rather than through deviations from what Teskey calls a “physical” correct path; in Milton, in this sense, there is no room for allegorical restriction (9). While it is obvious that Milton tries his best not to be allegorical in this traditional sense, not being traditionally allegorical is necessary for his revision of allegory in light of Puritan theology; the figural for Milton is clearly the earthly realm—which, as Luxon shows, is not an unusual conception for a Puritan, and Milton seems to succumb to and yet incorporate for the greater good of his argument his “allegorical fancies” (8).²⁷ While Teskey is correct in identifying the locus of action in the individual Puritan conscience, Milton is able to locate through republican speech-acts the “physical” or historical error of the fit reader: his republican past, which was as navigable as any Spenserian romantic quest. As noted above, this realm of error is not something Milton would want his fit reader to totally disavow, but rather to recognize

²⁶ See Gordon Teskey, “From Allegory to Dialectic: Imagining Error in Spenser and Milton,” 10: “In *Paradise Lost*, only a choice can be perverse, never an event in itself. In *The Faerie Queene*, however, where the narrative is not the vehicle but an instrument of meaning, no long speeches are given by the characters to explain why they act as they do. Redcross’s departure from Una, or truth, is in itself a perverse action leading directly to his own loss of faith.... there is no Cartesian sanctuary where Reason can sit back and choose.”

²⁷ See note 14. Luxon prefaces his argument by claiming that, due in part to interregnum millennial anxiety, various false incarnations of Christ (often radical preachers) were accused of giving in to “allegorical fancies” over the literalism of the Word—in both its scriptural and incarnate sense.

the secondary position it occupies in a Christian cosmos, if not due to Milton's commitment to idolatry as inner orientation then to his commitment to the possibility of a more successful and godly future English republic.²⁸

What Shore and Teskey ultimately show is that Milton neither totally refutes nor totally negates republicanism, even though he seems to want to do both, which brings my argument back to the issue of chronology in *Paradise Lost*. Milton feels the local instantiations of truth, such as republicanism (or any human activity for that matter), are evidence of a world that *should* be negated, and yet he is enough of a pragmatist to know that the provisionality of these local instantiations does not prevent Christians from engaging with them. In fact, it is just the opposite; these provisional locations that allow truth to imperfectly reveal itself are all that Christians have to rely upon "[t]ill time stand fixt" (12.555). However, this circumstance should not seduce Christians to idolize such instantiations. Fish sums up nicely this theological conundrum:

Here is a concise formulation of the vision that unites monism and the proliferation of difference: there is only one Truth and it is everywhere the same ("*homogeneous*"), but its form is not available to us in our present state, and we must rely on whatever state of illumination we may have reached while at the same time resisting the temptation to identify that state with the fuller one we shall know at our master's second coming. (*How Milton Works* 502)

The *form* of truth only comes with the Resurrection and the re-erection of the City of God, but until then one must rely upon "antiformalist" theology as it exists within the City of Man, which amounts to neither having *Paradise Lost* show, as Teskey indicates, nor tell, counter to what Shore believes (that Milton teaches the reader a "capacity for resistance"), *how* one should get from point A to point B, even if— and more so because— B is the outcome of a theology that is

²⁸ See previous section: Hill sums up Milton's goal for *Paradise Lost*, in *Milton and the English Revolution*, 364, thus: "By helping to discover where God's cause had been misinterpreted, it might lead to a recovery of hope and the prospect of more effective action in the future," "effective action" meaning a more effective politics.

self-evident. As Adam makes clear in Book Twelve, the eternal versus the mortal City defines Milton's epistemology; he replies to Michael:

How soon hath thy prediction, Seer blest,
Measur'd this transient World, the Race of time,
Till time stand fixt: beyond is all abyss,
Eternity, whose end no eye can reach.
Greatly instructed I shall hence depart,
Greatly in peace of thought, and have my fill
Of knowledge, what this Vessel can contain;
Beyond which was my folly to aspire. (12.553-560)

Adam is stuck dealing with *how* to view himself and his offspring, who are both within the “Race of time” and literally are a “Race of time,” unable to comprehend beyond the world to eternity or in light of eternity; the only certainty is that one must arrive there in order. Adam thus personifies the fit reader's position at this point in *Paradise Lost*. A glimpse of eternity, the whole of human history comprehended in one instance, is presented briefly in God's speech in the third book. What follows then is the thematization of fallen epistemology: the rhetorical sphere the fit reader must necessarily occupy, where this eternal truth is subsumed under the lure of dramatic relationship and rhetorical identification. In Book Twelve, however, the eternal vision for man is reasserted, but within a sphere of time wherein it can only be deduced *after* the event which is its cause.²⁹ As Adam clearly understands, fallen epistemology is firmly restricted to this latter realm, beyond which is “folly to aspire.”

While this situation seems obvious directly after the Fall in Book Twelve, the events thematized in the illocutionary space of Book Nine show how one can so easily aspire to

²⁹ Being aware that this causal apparatus for learning divine truth exists separate from divine truth itself is integral to Milton's thought according to Fish, who calls this kind of orientation “being-thinking” as opposed to “plot-thinking”: “In plot-thinking, one proceeds from the observable features of local contexts (who is doing what to whom, and for what apparent reasons) to the drawing of general conclusions; in antiplot or antinarrative thinking, one proceeds from general conclusions already assumed to the features of local contexts.” (*How Milton Works* 483)

transcend one's due boundaries; yet, in the case of the fit reader, this transcendental motive is in fact necessary. Book Twelve reveals that the republican speech which identifies the fit reader as a member of *Paradise Lost's* "fit audience... though few" in Book Nine neither modifies nor sheds any more light on God's speech in Book Three. Republican speech is only the "local instantiation" of divine speech, God's divine speech-act manifested in imperfect physical form. For the fit reader, the local instantiation is the "linguistic agreement" which foregrounds everything: the recognition of republican rhetoric and identification by means of it. Milton, in other words, while himself aspiring to prophecy, cannot go back on his didactic contract made with the reader through his fallen, typologically republican characters. What this obligation means is that, instead of *Paradise Lost* being about "one catastrophic act of negation," as Teskey claims, the lines of negation drawn within the mortal realm are not so clear. God's truth— his complete vision for humanity— cannot be known to us before the fall, as the bestowal of grace through effective action on the part of individual Christians can logically only happen in a postlapsarian epistemological context; it is in this sense that Milton's Fall is a *felix culpa*. The idolization of the English republic, like Eve's idolization of the apple and Adam's idolization of Eve, functions more in the fashion of a palimpsest than an act of total negation; it is a situation that, when under the right circumstances, shows itself to be a provisional step on the way to grace— relegated to be sure, yet always existing behind the fit reader's all-too-human understanding of the true path laid out for all eternity.

Paradise Lost, then, thematizes the epistemological limitations regarding the attainment of grace, and Milton's partial working out of a temporary solution on the mortal plane. Yet Milton's method for thematizing this epistemological circumstance, because of his antinomianism, cannot be one of seeming restraint. Rather, it is a method that uses republican

linguistic competence, a fundamental way of thinking lying at the heart of the fit reader's construction of himself, to implicate him in *Paradise Lost's* epistemological framework. Why it must be this way, aside from Milton's antinomianism and perhaps more importantly, is that this revelation of incapacity arising from within oneself (in effect completing the republican thoughts of the characters of *Paradise Lost*) mimics the experiential, phenomenal sense of certainty required by a Calvinist theology of self-knowledge: that is, the knowledge that one has received God's grace is revealed only through internal evidence, part of the justification of which is that the evidence is in fact found within oneself. Milton needs both sides of the antinomian/Calvinist equation, then, in order to highlight the true importance of this self-scrutiny without ever *seeming* to say anything that would explicitly direct the fit reader to have this experience, even though directing him to have this experience is the whole point.

In effect, Milton uses what Luxon terms the "notional" to help the fit reader along his way to the Puritan "experiential," using rhetorical identification to allow this process to seem self-evident and without question simply because it seems arisen from the self and acknowledged as correct by a prophet-like poet through an external, impersonal medium—the essence of Sloane's "Miltonic form" (4). This method requires that the rhetorical engagement of the fit reader's republican self be obscured behind the allegorical. In this sense, *Paradise Lost* is the perfect document of a Puritan realignment using politics, while itself not falling into the idolatrous trap it uses within its theological frame. As Fish notes, "although it remains true that [*Paradise Lost*] is preoccupied with valuing itself, it is at the same time *de*-valuing itself, for it is no less a temporal and corporeal medium than the mediums from which it would wean us" (*How Milton Works* 483-84). Allegory sustains the rhetorical space to carry out this action because of its ability, through the "identification of [and, in this case, with] personae" whose role is to mask

overt intention, to sustain Milton's means without foreclosing on the possibility of its end—having us relinquish external guides for that of the spirit³⁰ (Fletcher 311-312). Milton must sustain the political allegory in order to relegate the uncertain, postlapsarian cosmos it personifies (including the fit reader who inhabits it) to a position of incapacity. Milton makes of political allegory a readerly *felix culpa* that leaves the fit reader searching himself for a path more capable³¹ and more certain within. The importance of *intueor* is underlined through the experience of a capable intuition that was denied the fit reader within, even though that intuition arises from, political allegory. How the fit reader is to attain grace is implicit in the *form* of *Paradise Lost*'s argument, while the possibility of attaining it— what should be self-evident— is always made explicit by the poem's various flawed characters that try in vain (consciously on the part of Satan or unconsciously on the part of Adam and Eve) to militate against it. What Milton intends to tell (how to attain grace) he shows, while what he intends to show (his certainty of the possibility of grace) he tells.

III. Milton's Theology and the Origins of "Interpretive Communities"

Exploring Milton's allegorical method unveils the mechanics of reader engagement in *Paradise Lost*; how this method works to the advantage of Fish and his methodology of reader response will be the topic of the final part of this essay. I noted in the introduction that Fish's career involved a move from a phenomenological model of response, as seen in *Surprised by Sin*

³⁰ This turn inward is summed up best by Fish, in *How Milton Works*, 478: "At times in his prose and poetry Milton emphasizes the certainty [of trusting in God]; at other times he confronts us with the hazard; but in either mood the basic imperative he urges is the same: refuse external guides and work from the inside out"; and 484: "Where, then, do [the answers] reside? The answer is inevitable, given the strongly antinomian cast of Milton's thinking. They reside in us, in each reader who is asked to decide among the different scenarios projected...."

³¹ For Milton, as Hill shows, this is not only a more capable theology, but a more capable politics as well— evidence of Milton's not abandoning the cause. See note 28 above.

and his affective stylistics, to one involving “interpretive communities,” wherein the reader’s act of interpretation arises out of shared “interpretive strategies” already present in the community in which the reader exists. This transition manifests itself most clearly in Fish’s 1975 essay, “Interpreting the *Variorum*.” In this essay, Fish claims that an affective stylistic reading of Milton’s *Lycidas* offers the best resolution to disputes about this important poem in the Miltonic canon. However, he then argues that, while affective stylistics does offer an effective method of interpreting texts, it is a method that arises out of an arbitrary, institutional context, the institution being a “community made up of those who share interpretive strategies” (161). In other words, it is not just a tool that “recovers” the meaning of a text (161). This essay’s importance for Fish’s development lies in how it mimics the way in which Milton engages his readership: how Milton’s political rhetoric informs his Calvinist “phenomenology” can be seen as a template for how Fish’s “shared interpretive strategies” inform the reader’s experience of texts that affective stylistics purports to “recover”; just as Milton’s fit reader seems to recover self-evidence of election through Milton’s rhetorical machinations, a similar type of economy between communal rhetoric and individual experience seems to occur with Fish’s revised theory.³² As a result, two questions arise in comparing Fish’s methodological shift to Milton’s political, allegorical method in *Paradise Lost*. First, how does Fish’s intentionalist position—that readers “intend” the experience of a text according to externally-“imposed” interpretive strategies—define the experience of Milton’s own reader (161)? Second, how does Milton’s method of creating the

³² For the relationship between affective stylistics and interpretive communities see “Interpreting ‘Interpreting the *Variorum*,’” from *Is There a Text in This Class?*, 177: “[T]he stance [of “Interpreting the *Variorum*”]... is prescriptive, and it involves urging readers to read in a new or different way.... I do not say ‘this is the way you read whether you know it or not,’ but rather, ‘why don’t you try it this way.’ ‘This way’ means falling in with my assumption that the content of a reader’s experience is a succession of deliberate acts (or perceptual strategies) and then monitoring the acts which are produced by (rather than discovered by) that assumption.... Only if such a relationship [between Fish’s affective stylistic procedure and “shared or normative reading experience”] obtains can the polemic stance of the first half of ‘Interpreting the *Variorum*’ be justified....”

phenomenal experience of Calvinistic intuition by use of an external, shared political language explain Fish's move from a phenomenological to a communal understanding of interpretation in a way that does not undermine the assumption behind *Surprised by Sin*— that readers have a hand in “making” meaning? There is, admittedly, a circularity to this argument; Fish's method, I admit in the introduction, is what allows one to explore the fit reader's postulated experience in the first place. However, it is a robust circularity, as I will show, that both Fish and Milton invite.

Before leaving the topic of circularity, though, I must address how this circularity is advantageous for both Fish's reading of Milton and my reading of Fish. In “Interpreting the *Variorum*” Fish claims that the purported circularity of his argument— the fact that he describes “the experience of a reader who in his strategies is answerable only to an author's intention” while “specify[ing] the author's intention by pointing to the strategies employed by that same reader” is only circular if one assumes intentionality³³ is comprised of two independent acts (161). Fish claims that an account of intention can neither consider the author nor the reader alone in specifying what is being meant because “[t]o construct a profile of the... reader is at the same time to characterize the author's intention and vice versa” (161). Intention here must be considered a singular phenomenon because “[w]hat is being specified from either perspective are the conditions of utterance, of what could have been understood to have been meant by what was said” (161). In other words, separating a reader's *interpretive* act from the author's creative one creates a false dichotomy. Only when this dichotomy is accepted as valid, according to Fish, can the issue here at stake— intentionality— lead to true circular reasoning. One can find a good

³³ While intention of the authorial kind and intentionality of the philosophical kind are normally quite distinct, in Milton they are less so: what Milton *intends* his work to mean (that is, how the poem manifests Milton's purpose) overlaps to such an extent with the mental representation (Calvinist intuition) the reader is goaded into “seeing” that they cannot in good faith be separated, which is not surprising given Milton's monist ontology.

example of why the distinction must be abandoned in *Surprised by Sin*, when, after asking the question of why *Paradise Lost* concerns itself so much with the “fitness” of the reader, Fish answers:

[T]he reader who fails repeatedly before the pressures of the poem soon realizes that his difficulty proves its major assertions— the fact of the Fall, and his own (that is, Adam’s) responsibility for it, and the subsequent woes of the human situation. The reasoning is circular, but the circularity is appropriate to the uniqueness of the poem’s subject matter; for while in most poems effects are achieved through the manipulation of reader response, this poet is telling the story that *created* and still creates the responses of its readers and of all readers. (38)

Paradise Lost, as Fish sees it, is an origin story both in itself and for its own readership. In Fish’s terminology, then, *Paradise Lost* creates its own “conditions of utterance,” supplying the interpretive apparatus needed to apprehend its higher argument. Yet, as I have shown, a large part of this interpretive apparatus exists not only outside the poem, within the fit reader’s theological make-up, but outside both the poem *and* the fit reader in the normative realm of republican politics. The politically allegorical, republican-illocutionary, and chronologically ambiguous space Milton creates in *Paradise Lost* for his fit reader needs to be reconciled with Fish’s move to interpretive communities because, if Fish is to theorize authorial intention as being “two sides of a conventional act” (in that both specify the “conditions of utterance”), it follows that Fish’s own interpretation cannot transcend these conditions (161). What this entails is that the centerpiece of Fish’s theory, the “informed reader,” must be for the most part built to Milton’s specifications (161). How the fit reader and Milton as author converge in a shared purpose, as the previous section argues, will thus be the litmus test for judging whether or not Fish’s methodology is valid when it comes to interpreting Milton. If Milton uses republican politics to supply the space for the fit reader to align himself with the purpose of *Paradise Lost*, and if the marriage of republicanism to theology creates the practical rhetorical center that

comprises the “condition’s of utterance” for the poem, Fish, as an interpreter of Milton’s aims, must consign himself to being a participant in Milton’s communal, rhetorical project. Seeing Fish’s work in this light has two advantages. One is that Fish’s move from his phenomenological “affective stylistics” to his stringently rhetorical theory of “interpretive communities” (rhetorical, that is, insofar as it addresses the ways in which one is persuaded to read) can be found within Milton’s own textual logic (the use of the rhetoric of republican politics to “create” a seemingly self-arisen, phenomenal experience). The other advantage, in a similar manner, also makes it necessary to define Fish’s “antiformalism” specifically by what he finds anti-formal in Milton: his antinomian theology.³⁴

A pointedly self-conscious passage from the latter half of “Interpreting the *Variorum*” accounts well for the theoretical implications of this anti-phenomenal, anti-formal envisioning of intention:

Words like “encourage” and “disallow” (and others I have used in this essay) imply agents, and it is only “natural” to assign agency first to an author’s intentions and then to the forms that assumedly embody them. What really happens, I think, is something quite different: rather than intention and its formal realization producing interpretation (the “normal” picture), interpretation creates intention and its formal realization by creating the conditions in which it becomes possible to pick them out.... I “saw” what my interpretive principles permitted or directed me to see.... (163)

It must be noted, though, that the variorum case at issue regards Milton’s *Lycidas*, which is missing the overt statement of purpose of the kind found in the proem to Book One of *Paradise Lost*; Milton intends, and shows he keeps on intending, *Paradise Lost* to “justify the ways of God to men” when the “ways of God” are to his audience already known. Authorial intent, in this case, like the ultimate theological meaning of the political allegory shown in the previous section, cannot be questioned or placed in the hands of a reader who allows himself to “see” (the

³⁴ See note 24 above, as well as the last part of the previous section for more on how Fish uses Milton’s antinomianism to support his claim for Milton’s (and thus his own theory’s) anti-formalism.

term is used in Fish's sense) what that intention is. However, this kind of certainty in Milton only applies to the question of "what?", the unquestionable theological frame surrounding the much more circuitous and interpretively ambiguous path to get there—the path engendering the question of "how?". *How* Milton achieves this theological understanding is much more relevant to the sort of situation Fish describes: republican politics form the normative conditions that stipulate how Milton's speech-acts are to be understood in order for the fit reader to move toward a spiritual edification effected in large part by having the him recognize the incapacity of ungodly politics—a process not dissimilar from the "negative awareness" that Fish mentions in *Surprised by Sin*. If one treats the fit reader and Fish's later conception of readers in general³⁵ as relatively homologous, which is implicit in the previous sections of this essay, and accepts the fact that "intention is known when and only when it is recognized," then the reader's use of "interpretive strategies" is firmly restricted to the question of "how?" (164). This homology means that the reader's space of interpretation, once the fit reader is considered, should be envisioned as homologous with the space belonging to the fit reader; both spaces are concerned with communities of "shared hermeneutic customs," as Achinstein puts it, where "[interpretive] strategies exist prior to the act of reading and therefore determine the shape of what is read" ("Interpreting the *Variorum*" 171). That the reader is always embedded in the "conditions" of interpretation, then, is a quality both general and fit readers must, and indeed, do share. From a strictly rhetorical position, the general and fit readership both occupy the position of what T. Olbrechts-Tetyca and Chaïm Perelman call the "universal audience," the defining criterion of which is that the argument's persuasive force rests solely upon its unqualified acceptance by all who understand it—that is, a persuasive force based upon normativity (31). This posited

³⁵ This last section refers to the reader (in the various methodological forms used across his career) as postulated by Fish as simply "the reader," as he intends his account of interpretation (in its various forms) to apply to everyone; I use the "fit reader" in the same sense found in the previous sections.

“universal”³⁶ force applies both to Milton’s fit and to Fish’s generalized reader; the former due to ubiquitous theological doctrine and shared politics, the latter because the fact that one is able to read a certain way at all is due to one’s imbibing a prior set of interpretive strategies. For both readers, public rhetoric is used to support, yet at the same time not devalue, phenomenal experience.

As will be seen, the phenomenal experience of texts is the main problem in Fish’s nascent theory before he makes the transition to interpretive communities, which is best represented by his 1970 essay “Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics.” At this point in his career, Fish regards the act of reading as being “predicated on the idea of *meaning as event*, something that is happening between the words and in the reader’s mind” (28). In this conception, a sentence is “an extension of the ordering operation we perform on experience whenever it is filtered through our temporal-spatial consciousness” (29). In short, a word’s meaning is what it does to the reader (31-32). Fish’s project in *Surprised by Sin* is now worth a second look:

(1) the poem’s centre of reference is its reader who is also its subject; (2) Milton’s purpose is to educate the reader to an awareness of his position and responsibilities as fallen man, and to a sense of the distance which separates him from the innocence once his; (3) Milton’s method is to re-create in the mind of the reader (which is, finally, the poem’s scene) the drama of the Fall, to make him fall again exactly as Adam did and with Adam’s troubled clarity.... (1)

In *Surprised by Sin*, then, Fish claims that the locus of the fit reader’s fallen interpretation is restricted to “the mind of the reader,” the “poem’s scene.” Fish would today still hold all of

³⁶ “Universal” in the sense not of applying to everyone, but rather to what a speaker *expects* of everyone. See Olbrechts-Tetyca and Perelman, “The Universal Audience,” in *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation*, 31: “[The universal audience] refers, of course, in this case, not to an experimentally proven fact, but to a universality and unanimity imagined by the speaker, to the agreement of an audience which should be universal, since, for legitimate reasons, we need not take into consideration those which are not part of it.” In being both exclusive and universal, one can derive from this sort of argument principles both ethical (those who are “not part” of its audience should be, as in the case of *Paradise Lost*) and interpretive (only those who are a part of its audience accept it, as in the case of Fish). As a rhetorical device, speaking to a “universal audience” is also exclusive enough to be compatible with the more classical, aristocratic version of republicanism evinced by Milton.

these points, both those found in “Literature in the Reader” and *Surprised by Sin*, although he would qualify the assumption that meaning is found *only* in the mind of the reader; that is where meaning is realized, to be sure, yet it arises out of the interpretive community the reader inhabits, which for Fish means out of the intentional constraint described above.³⁷ What this means is that, while point (1) in the passage above is for the purposes of this essay assumed to be correct, Milton effects point (2), concerning the “responsibilities” of being fallen, through engaging not simply the reader’s stylistic response (the realm of the poem’s locutions), but the republican, rhetorical sphere of action (the realm of the poem’s illocutions) that undergirds this response and engages the fit reader in the sense in which Milton wants him to be engaged. The “sense of distance” from the poem’s higher argument, in this conception, occurs through the allegorical “turn” in Milton’s critique of republicanism toward the transcendent argument from which the fit reader is initially distanced. But, at the same time, the allegorical turn that effects the revelatory

³⁷ A telling passage regarding the importance of seeing interpretation as arising from a prior condition of understanding with regard to Milton’s theology can be found in Fish’s chapter “Gently Raised,” from *How Milton Works*, 488: “The doctrine [of testimony] is positive in that it allies testifier with deity... against the pressures of mere temporal (plot-centered) appearances; it is negative in the sense the testifier is so subordinate to the something holy of which she is the residence that she, as a separate individual, scarcely exists. Of course, these are not two separate poles, but differing perspectives on the same condition—the condition of being an incorporate member of God’s body; nevertheless the two perspectives are real and correspond to the different relationships you can have to the notion of an all-powerful God: you can affirm it joyfully, as the loyal angels do at a number of moments, or you can murmur at it, experiencing it not as a glorious promise but as an unbearable threat.” Fish shows in particular detail here that Milton’s monism, that all things are of and for God, is tied up with his antinomian commitment to freedom. No longer a dualistic ontology of textual meaning (in the sense that the text in itself arouses an affective response), this passage describes two different perspectives of one governing ideology, which, if it is to be interpreted, must be shared between author and reader alike—ideology, as something that constitutes belief in one’s interpretation, is the primary operating factor rather than the formal action of the text (although formal action still plays a role). Also see page 502, that “Milton’s radical republicanism (the heart of his politics) and his equally radical absolutism (the heart of his theology) is a function of his having joined the ontology of monism— there is only one thing real— to an antinomian epistemology— the real is only known perspectively....”

intuition Milton has him experience not only assures the fit reader that he can still arrive where he needs to arrive, but also that he can be more capable on the earthly, political stage.³⁸

How Milton positions the fit reader between these two spheres— Milton’s method being to reference the local and public sphere through an allegory which engenders in his fit reader a conception of the eternal justness of the process of election— will illuminate a possible aspect of why Fish finds the method of *Surprised by Sin* lacking: he confuses the question of “*how?*” with the question of “*what?*” Milton’s method, which is specific to the audience he aims to correct, is only a local manifestation of the ultimate, essential, and unchanging theological problem of man’s distance from the just course God has laid out— the rectification of which is the purpose of *Paradise Lost*. While Milton’s method of goading the fit reader into seeing this problem must be mutable in order for Milton to shape it into a form more readily understood by that reader, the problem itself is anything but. The ultimate “sense of distance” that implicates the fit reader’s depraved status already exists in the sense that it is the result of the long and winding road that is *Paradise Lost*’s evocation of this problem. This essential Christian argument of the poem thus functions as its “condition of utterance”: that to interpret the poem at all one must already be a member of Milton’s Christian community, which for Milton must include his politics. What *Paradise Lost* “teaches” then is the experience of already being a Christian that one in bad faith neglects; *Paradise Lost* does not intend to convert, but to reorient. Fish most likely put forth his initial thesis of *Surprised by Sin* because he saw what he deemed the more likely scenario: that if *Paradise Lost* is concerned, as it certainly is, with the correction of the fit reader and makes this reader its subject matter, which it seemingly does, then there does not seem to be a need for

³⁸ One should be reminded here again of Milton’s intention not *seem* to impose this experience (even though, in the end, he does) upon the reader, but rather use the fit reader’s political past to have it seem to him that he has arrived there on his own, only to then have this experience validated by the poet’s prophetic presence; see note 15 above. Also see note 28, referencing Hill’s statement of *Paradise Lost* envisioning a more effective politics.

anything other than the text and its subject, the fit reader, to generate the conclusion to the poem's argument. This happens, most likely, because Milton thematizes the generation of interpretation out of a set of circumstances—the fit reader's republican politics married to his Calvinist theology—that, while limiting the possibilities of interpretation, does not explicitly define those possibilities as does the imposition of doctrine or theory in general. Since Fish claims that readings are not generated according to the elaborate critical apparatus of “formalist analysis,” it makes sense that he would align himself with Milton's seemingly “anti-doctrinaire” approach (“Literature in the Reader” 36).³⁹ There is no need to *impose* a theory because existing in the interpretive realm of *Paradise Lost* simply does not require such imposition, as the reader is already assumed to be a Christian. Since the conclusion of the fit reader's interpretation already exists, *how* he interprets can best be described as a kind of “abductive” reasoning (his reasoning must be sufficient, but no one line of thought is doctrinally necessary), or a guided yet still active intuition based on evidence provided, regarding *how* he must arrive there—*what* he is to interpret the poem establishes from its outset.⁴⁰ *Paradise Lost* is, in this sense, somewhat resistant to theory in that it is always set in its final interpretation.

The consequence for Fish, who still restricts himself to reader response, is that he must position his theory as much in apposition to the interpretive consequences of Milton's theology and political ideology as he can. About forty years later, Fish finally finds his anti-theoretical, methodological equal in Milton by theorizing about Milton's antinomianism. *How Milton*

³⁹ The best summation of Fish's position regarding affective stylistics's opposition to formalist analysis occurs on page 42: “Of course, it would be easy for someone to point out that I have not answered the charge of solipsism but merely presented a rationale for a solipsistic procedure; but such an objection would have force only if a better mode of procedure were available. The one usually offered is to regard the work as a thing in itself, as an object; but... this is a false and dangerously self-validating objectivity [that the physicality of the text on the page yields object-hood]. I suppose that what I am saying is that I would rather have an acknowledged and controlled subjectivity than an objectivity which is finally an illusion.”

⁴⁰ See note 17 above.

Works, published in 2001, shows concern foremost with what Fish calls Milton's "antinomian epistemology" (cited above in section two, but worth reiterating):

The key [to reconciling Milton's politics and theology] is to recognize the relationship between his absolutism— his monism— and his epistemology, which is radically antinomian. That is to say, Milton's antiformalism, his refusal to identify truth with any of its local and temporary instantiations, his insistence on referring all decisions to the light of the individual conscience rather than to any external measure or prepackaged formula, precludes him from laying down the law even though he preaches the necessity of conforming to it. (*How Milton Works* 500)

Milton places his fit reader in a position where he must work through to the end of the poem using his "best guess" from the evidence Milton provides. Fish's early confusion of "how?" and "what?" is of particular importance here. As stated above, Milton assumes his fit reader to already be a Christian republican, and thus to already have the interpretive skills necessary to determine what Milton is arguing, why it is directed at him, and what Milton thinks he should do— as always with Milton, "be more godly," but also "keep true to the good old cause." This assumption stays an assumption because Milton and the fit reader already inhabit a world waiting for the greater world to come, along with all of the answers that will be found out, as Fish says, "at our master's second coming." Due to Truth's inability to be "identif[ed] with any of its local and temporary instantiations," the fit reader's only problem, as both a Christian and a republican, is how to be godly in light of (not despite) his failures. The early Fish does what is to some degree necessary, and yet at the same time is anathema to Milton's method of correction: in the nineteen-sixties Fish had to postulate a theory about— doing what Milton sought to avoid: imposing a rule upon— Milton's intended audience. This imposition is the thesis of *Surprised by Sin*: that Milton, through his textual medium, and only through this medium, stylistically "tempts" the fit reader into errors which, when taken together, create a sensory, affective response that is analogous to that of Adam after the Fall. In effect, Fish falls into the textual trap

that Milton's monism places for the fit reader, that the "entire poem on every level— stylistic, thematic, narrative— is an act of vigilance in which any effort, large or small, to escape its totalizing sway is detected and then contained" (*How Milton Works* 492). For the early Fish, Milton's act of vigilance, with the phenomenological restrictions he placed upon himself in the form of affective stylistics, could only be approached through universalizing a *particular response* to the poem into a perceived concrete "rule" of the poem's interpretation. The combination of Milton's monism and Fish's phenomenism yield the circular theory of *Surprised by Sin* because Fish is right in recognizing that circularity is the only approach "appropriate to the uniqueness of the poem's subject matter"— what is questionable is how rigidly Fish applies this circularity, in effect falling into his own kind of formalist trap where response is generated only by the text (*Surprised by Sin* 38). As seen above, Fish changes his mind about this position, so the question to now ask is what in Milton, what about the combination of Milton's monist ontology and antinomian epistemology, counters Fish's early phenomenological assumption. The corollary to this question is asking how the stipulations for Milton's reader add impetus to Fish's move towards interpretive communities, specifically in how intentionality relates to the "conditions of utterance." This will ultimately amount to asking how Fish himself thematizes a kind of "abductive" reasoning when it comes to his account of the reader, of how any reader approaching Milton must make his own "best guess" from the evidence— when it comes to the perceived intentions of the author— based upon a "looser" system of shared interpretive strategies, yet while still under the totalizing influence of these strategies' normative origin.

In light of his account of communal interpretation seen later in *Is There a Text in This Class?* and *How Milton Works*, the most obvious answer as to why Fish revised his approach

might be simply that Fish changed along with his own interpretive climate. The years leading up to 1980, the year *Is There a Text in This Class?* was published, were momentous for anti-foundationalist thinking in general. Arguably the most important work of this kind is Richard Rorty's *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, which contained a biting critique of the universalizing tendencies of philosophers of mind. This is not to say that Fish read Rorty and immediately revised his opinions (Fish first published "Interpreting the *Variorum*" in 1975 as an article, well before Rorty published *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* in 1979), but Rorty's and the later Fish's anti-foundationalist accounts of epistemology are remarkably similar in many important ways. Most relevant to the present study is how Rorty approaches intentionality and phenomenality as being a subset of what he sees as the main problem for the philosophy of mind: the universal/particular distinction (31). If intentionality, as a nonmaterial state, can only be ascribed to "phenomenal items" (as most philosophers of the mind going back to Descartes assume)—those items that are "directly before the mind," then the world can be "divided into things whose nature is exhausted by how they appear and things whose nature is not" (27-30). What results is that the philosopher can only describe the mind by particularizing a contrived universal property (e.g., instead of "pain" being the experience of a person, it is an immaterial category of "mind-stuff") — a "particular whose nature is exhausted by a single property" (30). The mind-body distinction is thus "parasitic on the universal-particular distinction," rather than the obverse (31). If the "grasp of universals" resulting from this analysis becomes the sole criterion of the mental, then radically different "events" such as intentions (which are not phenomenal) and sensations (which are) can be grouped under one rubric (51-54).

The implications of Rorty's general claim about intentionality, that speciously categorized universals are often mistaken for phenomenal particulars, for Fish's account of

Milton's monist ontology and antinomian epistemology can be found in Fish's 1997 preface to the second edition of *Surprised by Sin*, which attempts to qualify his 1967 argument in order to place it more in line with his latest work on Milton, *How Milton Works*. Fish identifies in the preface what he perceives as his original mistake "of thinking that [his] 'method' was recovering an experience rather than producing one" (xiv). However, the "metacritical nature of [Fish's] claim about the poem"—the shift from a phenomenological reading to one that is informed by interpretive-strategic assumptions—leads directly to Fish's defense of his method by a reference to Milton's theological monism (xv). If everything is of and for God in the case of *Paradise Lost*, of particular importance being Milton's highly restrictive statement of purpose, to "justify the ways of God to men," then interpretation itself is radically restricted as well. For example, one charge leveled at *Surprised by Sin* is that it enacts a "stifling authoritarianism" in the form of a "relentlessly reductive argument" centered on a perceived authorial intention (xii). Fish counters this charge by citing the strictly reductive apparatus of monism that Milton espouses. Monism is a position that informs both an epistemology of *Paradise Lost*, in that "all things are truly known in their relation to God," and the poem's politics, in that one must "act in any crisis so as to align yourself with the will of God" (xix). Informed by Augustine's distinction between "long joy" and "short joy" in scriptural interpretation, Fish insists on a "politics of being," wherein the "politics of long joy [in anti-empiricist fashion] refuses to derive general conclusions from bundles of particulars" so that one interacts with the world "in the terms mandated by a prior orientation"—an orientation toward God (liii). The most obvious parallel to Rorty's claim about intentionality lies in the last sentence: Fish claims that it is mistaken, if one is to adhere to Milton's "politics of being," to derive from particulars "general conclusions" or, more implicitly, universal theses of the kind found in *Surprised by Sin*. Instead, one must always view

phenomenal particulars as subordinate and possibly counter to the universal rubric of Milton's epistemology, which must be established *before* any accurate interpretation can take place. As shown above, it is precisely in how the characters of *Paradise Lost* are beholden to the narrow experience of particular situations that they miss the big picture and consequently fall.

What the early Fish did, then, in asserting a universal claim about the intention of *Paradise Lost*, was to particularize at every point in his reading the thesis of stylistic temptation he assumed was correct (and is assumed here to be correct). But again, what is universal applies to the question of "what?," which always refers to the absolute theological frame of Milton's narrative; always to "align yourself with the will of God" does not, and for Milton should not, dictate specifically *how* one is to do this (even if Milton seems fairly set in his ways). Thus the particular/universal distinction, in the case of Fish's reading of *Paradise Lost*, is integrally related to the how/what distinction in the case of Milton. One cannot transcend the local, experiential particulars that are necessarily present when one interprets within the earthly realm, but, in order for such interpretation to at least *align* itself with the transcendent, one must first know that the end of this interpretation will always be to align oneself with God. Milton's primary rule is that those who do not already intuit the solution will never solve the problem. Milton, in fact, bends his rule a bit when addressing how and why his fit reader is to first engage with *Paradise Lost*, finding that reader's competence in their shared republican language. He "bends" rather than breaks the rule because in the end this process of reader identification via politics resides under the monistic auspices of Calvinist theology, creating in that reader the *sensation* of Calvinist intuition in relation to the ultimate theological urge to "align [himself] with the will of God." It is in this way that Milton preempts Fish's affective stylistics: Milton creates a phenomenal experience from a *shared* epistemological circumstance found in

republican politics and its allegory of experiential Calvinism,⁴¹ a thoroughly anti-formalist exercise of engaging the reader in the sense that it adheres to the rather circular condition of interpreting authorial intention when both author and reader are bound together as “two sides of a conventional act” of meaning something. However, to interpret correctly within this sphere, the fit reader must already assume the monistic alignment of both Milton and himself with the transcendent, “universal” will of God— for Milton the only true universal. Milton therefore creates out of this universal assumption, shared communally between he and the fit reader, a phenomenal particular that *seems* to be “exhausted by” the “single property,” as Rorty would say, of Calvinist intuition. The Fish of *Surprised by Sin* supposes that each particular phenomenal experience of *Paradise Lost*’s style is congruent with a universal action of the work: to tempt the Puritan reader. Now it seems that the later Fish reverses this conception as a result of coming to a similar kind of epistemological understanding as Rorty, and must have a contrived (rather than empirically recovered) universal such as “temptation” be the thing that acts on the interpretation of a phenomenal experience, rather than the converse. Once the fit reader is considered, however, the impetus behind this move can just as easily be found in the theological constraints Milton places upon his fit reader as it can in the anti-foundationalist climate of the nineteen-seventies. Given the subject matter of Fish’s preface, the former seems the more likely scenario; Milton’s own “conditions of utterance”— his monistic theology coupled with republican politics always in the service of that theology— offer anti-foundationalist validation of an argument only tangentially similar to Rorty’s. Fish’s own “conditions of utterance,” his anti-foundationalism, finds its counterpart in the antinomian

⁴¹ Achinstein’s point is worth reiterating here: that “shared, recognizable political opinions” and “shared hermeneutic customs” are linked in allegory.

epistemological landscape of *Paradise Lost*.⁴² A picture of Fish approaching *Paradise Lost* from this communal standpoint is not unlike that of the fit reader: he proceeds by abduction from a preconceived notion of what he thinks Milton intends him to find. The evidence he finds is testable, analogous to the position of the fit reader, because Fish himself is informed of Milton's theological restrictions, is an informed reader; if the answer comes in the form of an experience of God being just, then he has made the correct interpretation insofar as it looks to the poem's transcendent argument. Yet, as Fish declares, the caveat is that if one can look to Milton in this way at all, then it is the result of a completely contemporary act of conventional understanding—that is, the competence that makes up the reader's half of "intending" meaning. In the same way that Milton's political allegory relates to experiential Calvinism, Fish's theory of interpretive communities preserves the economy between the experience of the reader (or critic) and the aims of the poet by locating intentionality in both. Insofar as this economy is preserved, both the principles guiding *Paradise Lost* and the contemporary normative environment guiding these principles' interpretation can be explicitly defined without privileging one over the other—a truly holistic account of the way in which *Paradise Lost* means.

The final question, then, is what does it mean for Fish to be a reader of Milton? In the introduction, this question was raised under the guise of revealing the origins of Fish's "metacritical" argument about his theory of reading Milton, and of his theory of reading in general. The answer can be found by exploring the initial thesis of *Surprised by Sin* as it relates to Milton's method: if Milton's method is to engage the reader by a public rhetoric designed to elicit a phenomenal response, then a thesis such as *Surprised by Sin*'s, limited in scope to

⁴² Fish's statement about intention and conditions of utterance cited at the beginning of this section should be applied here; from "Interpreting the *Variorum*," 161: "What is being specified from either perspective [the author's and reader's] are the conditions of utterance, of what could have been understood to have been meant by what was said. That is, intention and understanding are two ends of a conventional act, each of which necessarily stipulates... the other."

Milton's theology and his reader's intended response (again, Fish's "anti-theoretical" impulse should be noted), cannot be entirely descriptive of what Milton is doing. This is so because, in order to accurately describe Milton's authorial intention where the reader "makes" the meaning as much as the author (recall that Fish describes intentionality as "two sides of a conventional act"), a theorist of reader response such as Fish must follow the logic of his thesis to its full conclusion. The conclusion comes, for Fish, when his theory simply makes one aware of what Milton has already been doing— talking about his readership. This begs the question of what remains to be done. As Jonathan Culler crucially notes in his evaluation of Fish's early work:

If... one claims that the qualities of literary works can be identified only in the structure of the reader's response, then literary theory has a crucial explanatory task: it must outline the conditions and parameters of response; it must account for responses by investigating the conventions and norms which enable responses and interpretations to be as they are. (123)

Culler goes on to criticize the early Fish for not exploring fully enough the conditions of interpretation in favor of his "admirable humanism" of focusing on the reader (126). According to Culler's argument, Fish describes what Milton does at the expense of saying something new about what it means to read Milton, because for Fish doing the latter would involve imposing an unneeded theory upon *Paradise Lost*, i.e. "import some principle of relevance which may be only contingently connected with the experience of the poem" (122). How, then, is Fish able to justify his theory of reading Milton? The theoretical⁴³ consequence for Fish is that this impulse to describe what Milton does must go beyond description simply because description, in this case, renders Fish's early theory transparent and, however many relevant points it brings up, somewhat inconsequential. If antinomianism, monism, and Calvinism, as parts of Fish's argument, are not things that, as Fish makes clear, are "recovered," if there is nothing new to be

⁴³ "Theoretical" in the sense that Culler ascribes to Fish: as that which is "only contingently connected" to the text.

said about how Milton uses his method, and if what this method aims toward is always and already established, the one thing left for Fish as a reader-response theorist to do is scrutinize and problematize himself as a reader, to offer up for self-critical analysis what in his theory of readership is “inconsequential” when set against such a highly methodological poem such as *Paradise Lost*, “in which the concept of the reader has a distinctive hermeneutic role” (128).⁴⁴ A poem *about* readership (that is, a poem that thematizes the reader in its narrative), when analyzed by a theorist of readership, always submits such a theory to a reflexive questioning about the candidacy of that theory as a proper reading.⁴⁵ “Interpretive communities,” as an attempt for one theorist to come to terms with his theory’s limits by outlining the conventional aspects of the act of reading, is a response to this reflexivity. By having a modern reading be generated out of a contemporary, normative circumstance, Fish makes evident the *innate* inconsequentiality of affective stylistics for reading Milton. Yet in describing this contemporary position of the reader as being only one side of a “conventional” act between author and reader, Fish is able to stay consistent with the very relevant assumption of *Surprised by Sin*. In other words, in order to fully complete a descriptive analysis of the reader of *Paradise Lost*, Fish must consider himself a reader as well.

⁴⁴ See Jonathan Culler’s sharply critical essay, “Stanley Fish and the Righting of the Reader,” from *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction*, 126: “It is not a little ironic [talking about Fish’s early thought in *Surprised by Sin*, “Literature in the Reader,” and *Self-Consuming Artifacts*] that a man who has so imperiously thrust the reader before us... and insisted that meaning and value lie not in the text but in the activity of the reading, should then turn and tell us that we need not enquire what this activity involves. Indeed, it is not ironic but bathetic.” This sense of anti-climax, or, more generously, incompleteness regarding Fish’s early theory perhaps explains well why Fish turns toward a metatheoretical project to justify and revise, rather than throw out, his initial theoretical claims. Culler also notes that Fish’s most successful work is *Surprised by Sin* precisely because *Paradise Lost* takes the reader into consideration as much as Fish (128).

⁴⁵ See “Interpreting ‘Interpreting the *Variorum*.’” Fish describes his theoretical stance which, I argue, allows this type of reflexivity in the following manner: “Rather than citing evidence, I am manufacturing it by stipulating in advance that a scrutiny of the materials will reveal just the kind of activities that I claim readers to be performing. In short, for the ‘evidence’ to be supporting, it requires the addition or superimposition of the very hypothesis it would test” (178).

In the end, Fish is able to both justify and revise his initial reading because he takes into account those conditions of interpretation that Culler predicted that Fish would need to take into account, while at the same time not devaluing the circularity of his initial reading that Milton, as shown by his theological-political argument, so clearly necessitates. In “Interpreting the *Variorum*’s” most reflexive moments, we find Fish at a midpoint between the necessary circularity of interpreting Milton, evidenced by his earlier work, *Surprised by Sin* and affective stylistics, and the equally necessary recognition of the contemporary, normative origin of his interpretation. It is in this sense that Culler is correct in saying that the merits of Fish’s theory lie in that “it offers a hermeneutic method... which nevertheless remains faithful to, or explicitly predicated upon, the actual experience of reading” (119). However, only with *How Milton Works*, with his full appreciation of the relationship between Milton’s antinomian epistemology and his monism, are we able to see the full scope of how Miltonic principles inform his theory of normative interpretation: it is only insofar as Fish takes into account the contemporary reader’s “creative” faculty— his ability to “intend” and therefore mean— that Fish is able to align his method with Milton’s original project of directing his reader, according to those same principles and through a similar awareness of the reader’s creative capacity, onto the true path. It is a peculiar intersection of a poet and theorist that shows one theory’s limits: as Milton already describes his ideal reader, Fish must simply ask himself if his own description, as a public artifact that exists between poet and critic, belongs in the already-envisioned sphere of the poem’s proper audience.

Conclusion

What this essay seeks to emphasize is the complex interrelatedness of Milton and his readers, both the fit and the critical. One should, as well, be aware of the implications of this interrelatedness for both Milton's method of engaging his readership and the methodology of one particularly influential critic, Stanley Fish. Milton's allegorical method, when it comes to the rhetorical effects it has upon his readership, engages the reader on a methodological and, furthermore, practical level: *how* to save the fit reader, and by extension republican England. For Milton, the right path is both the most godly and the most politically effective, in that only when England is seen for what it is— a figuration of the City of God— can proper government by its Christian inhabitants be effected and its role as Milton's chosen nation be fulfilled. For Milton's fit readership, salvation is achieved by having republican politics act as a type of negative allegory of the spiritual path that, once recognized, will make that politics all the more effective in the sense that earthly politics, the City of Man, will always be seen in light of the City of God. For Milton, the path— the method— is the crux of his higher argument. Stanley Fish's career should stand as testimony to the centrality of method in Milton's poem; Fish takes into proper account Milton's antinomian epistemology and monist ontology because his own method is one that addresses the same problematic space where these points of doctrine make themselves manifest: the mind of his reader, and the public space in which that reader exists. Fish's reader, in both experiencing that which Milton intends for him to experience and requiring the contemporary normative space that engenders a correct interpretation of this experience, pointedly illustrates the necessity of Fish's alignment of his method with how Milton engages his own fit reader. To read Milton, Fish's later theory implies, one must already to a large degree "inhabit" this space, a point that here applies both to reader and theorist alike. One approaches,

then, the importance for literary theoretical practice: Fish reads according to Milton's terms because Fish's vision of Milton is not an artifact of his methodology, but the condition of its existence. Fish neither imposes theory upon nor discounts the role of Milton's method; to achieve this balance Fish allows Milton to supply the principles to which the modern interpreter of Milton must adhere. Insofar as Milton's "construction" of his audience delimits the modern reader's interpretive options, Fish, as a theorist of reading, is similarly beholden to the interpretive principles that arise out of the original experience of this intended audience. In recognizing the limitations of his role as theorist, Fish ends where he began: describing the role of the reader and the ways that reader experiences his or her role in understanding not only the rhetorical strategies of literary language, but, as Milton intimates, the centrality of his or her position in *Paradise Lost*.

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Annotated Bibliography

Achinstein, Sharon. "Milton and the Fit Reader: *Paradise Lost* and the Parliament of Hell."

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Achinstein explores the relationship between the royalist allegory of the Parliament of Hell genre and Milton's own use and revision of this trope. She notes royalist propagandists often used the Parliament of Hell genre to allegorize, and thus critique the principal actors in the revolution and Protectorate (195). It is through these circumstances of reading that the "fit reader of allegory... was to become a partisan reader" who identified with an author "through shared, recognizable political opinions, and also by the shared hermeneutic customs" (179). For Achinstein, this genre's popularity in the Interregnum evidences "a literary culture that was intensely interested in political analysis" (181). While royalist allegorists made blatant comparisons or offered keys to a discerning readership, both of which offer unambiguous interpretation for their appropriate audiences, Milton makes "[p]erplexity," first thematized in *Paradise Lost* as a Satanic virtue, "a starting point for [his] revolutionary reader" (214). In effect, by dispersing this satanic virtue among interpreters in general (Adam and Eve, the reader, and even Milton himself), Milton thematizes an "allegorical" mode of reading that is designed to test the internal spiritual orientation that guides interpretation (210). He resists the "satanic practice of allegory, in which there is a one-to-one relation between the political order, the cosmic order, and the representational order," in favor of a style that thematizes the initial problems of interpretation found in allegorical reading (222). Milton provokes "allegorical interpretations while refusing to supply unequivocal 'keys' to the allegory," at one time both challenging to overcome and "warning his revolutionary readers" about the perilous status of cosmic and earthly interpretation (222). As the only direct and sustained treatment of the relation between politics and allegory in

Paradise Lost, this chapter is essential to my argument. However, I would go even farther and say that, rather than portraying specific political moments as allegorical “temptation,” the whole of the poem can be viewed as an allegorical frame narrative meant to engage and reconcile both the political and spiritual makeup of the “revolutionary reader.” Her argument stemming from “perplexity” as opposed to “Spenserian error” is also a convenient foil for Teskey’s argument against allegory in Milton.

Burke, Kenneth. “Identification and ‘Consubstantiality’.” *A Rhetoric of Motives*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1969. 20-23. Print.

Burke examines here the how the ambiguous nature of substance, explained as that which defines the locus of motivation, allows a speaker to engage his audience. Burke sees the primary function of rhetoric as “identification,” that “insofar as [two persons’] interests are joined, A is *identified* with B” (20). Ambiguity arises from the fact that, while A is “substantially one” with B on the level of interest, and can have a common motive in mind, A remains an “individual locus of motives” (21). He is at once both “consubstantial” with and “distinct” from B. A person can be considered consubstantial with another because, in the realm of common action, “men have common sensations, concepts, images, ideas, [and] attitudes” (21). What this implies, for Burke, is that the realm of rhetoric approaches “classification in its *partisan* aspects,” of how individuals “become identified with groups... at odds with one another” (22). The ambiguity of the substance of motivation extends into this area of “partisan” classification, in that identification implies its counterpart, division (22). Seeing identification as the hallmark of motivation is useful in exploring the rhetorical aspects of contractual agreement, in that, if someone must be persuaded to enter into an agreement, they must see its substantial, “factional”

appeal. If the fall of man can be seen as a contest over republican speech, then republican speech must be somehow substantial to the various “political” alignments between the characters, and thus function toward the fit reader’s identification with those characters.

Culler, Jonathan. “Stanley Fish and the Righting of the Reader.” *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1983. 119-131. Print.

Culler’s essay is a rather harsh criticism of Fish’s early theory, as represented by *Surprised by Sin*, “Literature in the Reader,” and *Self-Consuming Artifacts*. Culler starts with the merits of Fish’s theory: that “it offers a hermeneutic method... which nevertheless remains faithful to, or explicitly predicated upon, the actual experience of reading” (119). However, Culler’s main criticism of Fish is that for such a (self-described) revolutionary theory, it ought to “have more radical consequences” (120). While he admits that envisioning the reader not as a “tabula rasa” is at the present time (1975) sorely needed, Culler wishes Fish’s theory did more to “outline the conditions and parameters of response,” as well as “account for responses by investigating the conventions and norms which enable responses and interpretations to be as they are” (121-123). Culler opines that Fish’s model of the act of reading seventeenth-century literature is not only theoretically wanting in this respect, but is in fact “bathetic” due to its inconsequentiality (126). However, Culler notes, to follow up on the claim that “one is recounting the experience of readers and that one is producing new and striking interpretations” is quite a “difficult act” (127). Culler contends that Fish is most successful, in this respect, in *Surprised by Sin*, because “*Paradise Lost* is a poem in which the concept of the reader has a distinctive hermeneutic role” (128). Still, Culler perceives a “considerable duplicity in [Fish’s] refusal to discuss the [literary and “interpersonal”] conventions” his argument assumes, especially when it comes to literature

that is not so reader-centered as *Paradise Lost* (129). I find this account useful in two respects. Culler offers a cogent argument as to why *Surprised by Sin* is so successful a work of criticism while its offshoot, “affective stylistics,” was from the beginning in need of revision as a general theory of reading. More importantly, however, Culler offers support for my argument that *Surprised by Sin*’s success as a work of reader-centered criticism gains its theoretical clout from being “about” the same subject as the poem: the reader.

Dzelzainis, Martin. “Milton’s Politics.” *The Cambridge Companion to Milton*. Ed. Dennis Danielson. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010. 70-83. Print.

In this analysis of Milton’s notion of freedom, Dzelzainis contends that we must look at *Areopagitica*, which puts forth a conception of freedom as “due process” within the state (76). Freedom, as Milton has it, can only exist when citizens “are not constrained by the state into conducting themselves otherwise than they would have done if left to their own devices (76). This model of government, while still under the rule of law, is noted as being different from “determination” by the state, in which one is dependent upon government (77). Milton considers this latter position a false freedom (77). This determination in licensing books “nullif[ies] freedom of speech and [would] erect a ‘tyranny over learning’” (77). To this conception of freedom is added the governing principle of right reason, an internal manifestation of just, Judeo-Christian principles that would be constrained otherwise (79). An example of this in action is the regicide, which Milton supported as being inherently justified by God in those who carried it out or supported it (80). I believe this latter point has one crucial implication for interpretation of *Paradise Lost*, in that Milton presupposes that what is right is inherent to the public that attends to right reason. Thus, a justification of God or one’s own salvation is not necessary to explicate

directly as it is a divine action to which human faculties are only wedded. However, Milton must still educate the public, and he achieves this obliquely by the political-allegorical structure of the poem, a structure that has the advantage of being a roundabout method and therefore not a forced argument that would undercut the sense of agency and responsibility attendant on the use of right reason.

Fallon, Stephen M. "‘Elect Above the Rest’: Theology as Self-Representation in Milton." *Milton and Heresy*. Eds. Stephen B. Dobranski and John P. Rumrich. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998. 93-116. Print.

Fallon accounts for the inconsistencies in Milton’s notion of salvation, manifested in God’s speech in the third book of *Paradise Lost*, by attributing these to a conflict between the Arian doctrine of non-predestined salvation and Milton’s concern about his own status as a member of a Calvinist-inspired elect. This conflict occurs due to the fact that, in God’s speech, “an apparent residue of Calvinist teaching on election disturbs the otherwise Arminian and libertarian doctrine of the mature Milton, resulting in... different and incompatible forms of distinction” (94). God at first argues for a traditional Calvinist elect, but then qualifies the argument by explaining that there are elect who must make to receive grace or not, enacting a “trifold” division of souls: “those elect by special grace, those who with the aid of general grace accept God’s call to salvation, and those who reject this general grace” (95). For Fallon, God’s speech “opens a window on Milton’s incompatible desires to be both among a special super-elect... and those who are elect by virtue of their free choices” (97). Analyzing Milton’s *Christian Doctrine*, Fallon finds many instances where Milton modifies common scriptural interpretation in order to fit his own circumstance (98-100). Milton, in these instances, “allowed his self-conception and

the project of self-justification to play a role in the formation of his theology” (100). Fallon argues against what many have interpreted as Milton’s theology of a “super-elect,” citing Milton’s idiosyncratic reading of Arminius; that (quoting Milton) “God does not consider everyone worthy of equal grace.... But he considers all worthy of sufficient grace” due to his justice (106). Fallon interprets this passage as support for a “spiritual aristocracy” *within* a body those able to choose, defined by an “inborn virtue” or “a healthy allotment of the ‘traces of the divine image’” (107). Milton, as it so happens, sees himself as part of this aristocracy, but this self-representation always “re-assimilates” this “special status... into the general condition of humankind (108). While this re-assimilation is done so successfully in the *Christian Doctrine*, in *Paradise Lost* it is more ambiguous, leading to both an incorrect interpretation of Milton’s theology as well as a heightened sense of Milton’s “special status” as prophet-poet for the reader (110). I find this argument very compelling, and, in light of Sloane’s implication that Milton’s poetic persona cannot be identified with on a rhetorical plane, very useful. I argue that Milton creates through a careful arrangement (*dispositio*) of speech acts a mirror of Puritan-revolutionary experience, and Fallon seems to support the “psychology” behind such a restriction.

Fish, Stanley. “Gently Raised.” *How Milton Works*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2001. 477-510.

Print.

Fish explains the implications Milton’s monism and antinomianism have for interpreting *Paradise Lost*. Fish contends that the “entire poem” is an “act of vigilance” whereby “[e]very movement outward from a still center must be blocked; every vehicle of that movement must be identified for what it is”: idolatry (492). This “still center” is the basic dictum Fish finds in

Milton: to “refuse external guides and work from the inside out” while always trusting in God (478). From this antinomian insistence on internally realized faith, a relation between reader and text can be derived. There is first the fact that the answer to any spiritual question that *Paradise Lost* raises or addresses “reside[s] in us, in each reader who is asked to decide among the different scenarios projected by... multiple meanings” that are only resolvable in light of the inward certitude of divine benevolence (484). Such an orientation, while placing enormous importance on scenes in *Paradise Lost* which elicit such spiritual calculus, also devalues the poem as text, “for [*Paradise Lost*] is no less a temporal and corporeal medium than the mediums from which it would wean us” (483-484). For Milton, anything “beyond [subordination to God] is not an operative category,” which is the central argument of his Monism (498). It is in this sense that Milton’s “antiformalism” (his monistic ontology and antinomian epistemology of reading or interpretation in general) “precludes him from laying down the law even though he preaches the necessity of conforming to it” (500). From this argument based on Milton’s monism and antinomianism, Fish derives a methodological crux that is crucial to his thesis of stylistic temptation found in *Surprised by Sin*: because Milton cannot formulate an argument for the right path within the variable universe of human action, “choice must be made again and again in circumstances that demand ever new calculations and recalculations and bring ever new opportunities to go wrong” (509). For the purposes of my essay, Fish’s conception of the need for the “material” aspects of *Paradise Lost* to be negated for benefit of the spiritual coherence of individual action is highly important. It both invites a space for the “temptation” of a political reading such as that of Norbrook or Hill (who supply the foundation for my argument of allegorical negation) by the very need for that reading to be subverted for the needs of the greater argument.

Fish, Stanley. "Interpreting 'Interpreting the *Variorum*.'" *Is There a Text in This Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1980. 174-180. Print.

In this short response to critics, Fish both argues for and amplifies his line of thought found in "Interpreting the *Variorum*." Of particular importance to my argument that Fish in his later career is motivated by reflexivity is his succinct statement that by "stipulating in advance" what counts as "evidence" for a particular reading, the method of reading must already be assumed (178). Therefore, "for the 'evidence' to be supporting, it requires the addition or imposition of the very hypothesis it would test" (178). Whereas other— particularly formalist— critics assume this "evidence" to have an objective existence, Fish's conception of evidence arises from his theory's consciousness of "arbitrariness"; rather than being arbitrary and not knowing it, as he claims is the case with formalist criticism, arbitrariness "enters [his procedure] at the beginning, when a set of assumptions is adopted which subsequently directs and generates the analyses" (179-180).

Fish, Stanley. "Interpreting the *Variorum*." *Is There a Text in This Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1980. 147-173. Print.

In this essay, Stanley Fish elaborates on the methodological advantages of his theory as espoused in "Affective Stylistics," with the important caveat at the essay's end, claiming affective stylistics as an institutional presupposition arising from the actions of an "interpretive community," rather than from strict textual analysis alone. In the latter part of this essay, Fish explains the logic of this move. He starts, as with "Affective Stylistics," by describing the experience of the text as evidence of authorial intention (160-61). Fish elaborates this intentionalist position by emphasizing that it arises from the wider "assumption that [authors] are

dealing with intentional beings” (161). This wider interpretation will take into account the “descriptions of a succession of decisions made by readers about an author’s intention” (161). To avoid circularity in positing “intention and understanding” as interpretive cruxes where one describes the other, Fish then places emphasis on the “conditions of utterance” (161). To do this is to describe a “conventional act,” in that to describe both an informed reader and authorial intent one must “specify the *contemporary* conditions of utterance” by identifying and joining “a community made up of those who share interpretive strategies” (161). In this conception, “different interpretive strategies will *produce* different formal structures,” a move that at once appropriates the method of affective stylistics while identifying it as one such interpretive strategy, and thus distancing it from its phenomenological origin (169).

Fish, Stanley. “Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics.” *Is There a Text in This Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1980. 21-67. Print.

This essay stands as Fish’s “manifesto” of his theory of affective stylistics. The method that he lays out is very much the same as that implied by *Surprised by Sin*, only now fleshed out in theoretical, and sometimes polemical, form. He conceives of the act of reading as being “predicated on the idea of *meaning as event*, something that is happening between the words and in the reader’s mind” (28). In this conception, the sentence is “an extension of the ordering operation we perform on experience whenever it is filtered through our temporal-spatial consciousness” (29). In short, a word’s meaning is what it does to the reader (31-32). Fish qualifies this idea by explaining that the meaning of a sentence is not the meaning of its words, rather that the words are only “a constituent of, but certainly not to be identified with, its meaning” (32). From this, he goes on to critique strict formalist analysis. Fish claims an

advantageous position in regard to formalism in the sense that formalism's consideration of "the utterances apart from the consciousness receiving it" leads to that method "miss[ing] a great deal of what is going on", in other words the entire possible range of meanings of the utterance (32). In Fish's mind, formalist analysis might catch some interactions between words that constitute a part of the meaning of a sentence, but would miss other relevant constituents of this meaning because of its inconsiderate stance towards reception (36). This stems from formalism's presupposition of the "objectivity of the text," which is really an "illusion... of self-sufficiency and completeness" due to the "physically convincing" nature of the printed page (43). What the critic must realize is that "the temporal flow [of the sentence] is monitored and structured by everything the reader brings with him, by his competences" (46). For my purposes, the main question will center on how this idea of competence works in Milton's seventeenth-century, post-revolutionary context. If Fish can make the critical leap from phenomenology to community (if my claim of parallelism between Fish's theory and the theology of *Paradise Lost* is correct), then it follows that Milton's fit reader must do the same. Milton, I argue above, achieves this (ironically) through making that reader's political experience an allegory of his salvation.

Fish, Stanley. "Preface to the Second Edition." *Surprised by Sin: the Reader in Paradise Lost*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1997. ix-lxix. Print.

Most relevant to this study, Fish outlines several points of relevance between his revised stance of interpretive communities and *Paradise Lost*, while at the same time supporting, for the most part, his original thesis (in just the same way as in "Interpreting the *Variorum*"). Fish identifies in the preface what he perceives as his original mistake "of thinking that my 'method' was

recovering an experience rather than producing one” (xiv). However, the “metacritical nature of [Fish’s] claim about the poem”— the shift from a phenomenological reading to one that is informed by critical assumption— leads directly to Fish’s defense of his method by an allusion to Milton’s position of theological monism (xv). If everything is of and for God in the case of *Paradise Lost*, then correct interpretation is radically restricted. For example, one charge leveled at Fish’s 1967 reading of *Paradise Lost* is that it enacts a “stifling authoritarianism” in the form of a “relentlessly reductive argument” centered on a perceived authorial intention (xii). Fish counters this by citing the strictly (at first glance) reductive apparatus of monism that Milton espouses. Monism is a position that informs both an epistemology of *Paradise Lost*, in that “all things are truly known in their relation to God,” and the poem’s politics, in that one must “act in any crisis so as to align yourself with the will of God” (xix). Informed by Augustine’s distinction between “long joy” and “short joy” in scriptural interpretation, Fish insists on a “politics of being,” wherein the “politics of long joy [in anti-empiricist fashion] refuses to derive general conclusions from bundles of particulars” so that one interacts with the world “in the terms mandated by a prior orientation”— an orientation toward God (liii). It is in this sense that “pride and obedience name the positions perceiving agents already occupy,” which creates right or wrong perceptions of events (xxvii). This focus on the perception of events as instances of prior orientation, as well as the shift away from the phenomenal that “long joy” interpretation implies, indicates for me that there is an essential parallelism between the certain theological cruxes of *Paradise Lost* and the theoretical progression that can be seen from “Affective Stylistics” to “Interpreting the *Variorum*.” Fish’s discussion of the arbitrariness of deriving general conclusions from phenomenal particulars also bears a striking resemblance to Richard Rorty’s critique of epistemology, as seen below. If Fish denies the direct correlation of

particular phenomena leading to a universal interpretation, that is, if a reader's intentional state is no longer directly correlated to the phenomenal, as Rorty argues, then the interpretation of a reading experience can no longer be considered only the stylistic effect of the text upon a reader.

Fish, Stanley. *Surprised by Sin: the Reader in Paradise Lost*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1997.

Print.

This book serves as both the earliest version of Fish's particular method of reader response, as well as the theoretical backdrop for exploring the "fit reader's" experience in reading *Paradise Lost*. The book rests on three related assumptions, all concerning the reader. The first is that "the poem's centre of reference is its reader who is also its subject" (1). Second, that "Milton's purpose is to educate the reader to an awareness of his position and responsibilities as a fallen man" (1). Third, that "Milton's method is to re-create in the mind of the reader... the drama of the Fall" by persuading the reader to "fall again exactly as Adam did" by experiencing and then falling for various stylistic temptations put forth Milton (1). All of these machinations are in the service of teaching the reader, of providing "his audience with a basis of moral action" (1). Fish's contention is that if "we transfer the emphasis from Milton's interests and intentions which are available to us only from a distance" to an emphasis upon the reader's present experience of the poem, then "an intelligible pattern" will emerge (3). As I've mentioned in other annotations regarding Fish, this last statement is the most problematic in relation to his later conception of response found in his theory of interpretive communities.

Fletcher, Angus. "Value and Intention: the Limits of Allegory." *Allegory: the Theory of a Symbolic Mode*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1967. 304-359. Print.

The final chapter of this book deals with an analysis of aesthetic judgment as it relates to the allegorical mode, as well as an exploration of how authorial intention in allegory restricts such judgment. Fletcher contends that, since the “surface structure” of allegory implies a “thematic” reading that “attempts to eliminate other possible readings,” that allegorical works “deliberately restrict the freedom of the reader” (305). Allegories deal with doctrines (in both secular and religious terms), and by this action necessitates a “teleological control” over their subject matter (307). As a mode involving a multiplicity of meaning, allegory risks obscuring this control to the reader, but this risk is vitiated when its “doctrinal” limits are considered (310-11). This amounts to obscuring a “particular intention” while leaving no “doubt as to the *kind* of search for intention that is involved” in reading allegory: the “identification of personae” the role of whom is to mask overt intention (311-312). In this sense, while allegory always risks a strictly mimetic reading, its multi-leveled “aesthetic” is “intended to elicit from the reader some sort of exegetical response” that is open to anyone who has the “decoder’s skill” (323). The risk of misinterpretation that exists concurrently with overt, intended meaning leads Fletcher to conclude that most allegory “is not so much written *in* a fog of compulsion as it is written *about* the fog of compulsion,” meaning that allegory often thematizes its own problems of interpretation (341). The end result of allegory, however, is always “to allow a degree of certainty into a world of flux” (344). Fletcher’s conception of the mutual dependency of provisional “fog” with ultimate certainty is crucial to my understanding of how Sloane’s concept of anti-rhetorical, anti-humanist certitude in Milton functions in the allegorical structure of *Paradise Lost*.

Hill, Christopher. *Milton and the English Revolution*. New York: Penguin, 1979. 341-412. Print.

Christopher Hill's book provides a compendium of the politics of Milton's life and written works. The chapters "The Fall of Man" and "*Paradise Lost*" are particularly illuminating in this respect, as they provide a relatively short evaluation of Milton's politics as they relate to the poem. Hill is careful to note that historical context can differ from "surface meaning" (354). However, he insists that a wide interpretation is the luxury of the critic, not the historian, and that if one is to get at the center of what Milton believed at the time of his writing *Paradise Lost*, one must look to history (355). Therefore, Hill's method is to trace certain strains of thought in the poem to other historical documents and situations. Most relevant to the present analysis is the claim that Milton viewed the English radicals' politics as "[becoming] license" because enacted for the wrong reasons. Milton is shown by Hill to thematize in Satan the result of perverting republicanism's core values ("self-interest, jealousy, ambition"), which allows him to "reinforce a parallel between earth and heaven," namely that "Angels, like men, elect their own salvation" (367). The result is that the English republic failed because the "desire for reformation did not sink deeply enough into the consciences of [its] supporters" (350). This conscience is most important because "the true fight is fought first in the hearts of men," and as Hill states, "[w]hen that is won, no external enemies will remain to overcome" (364). And, most important for my essay, Hill claims that "[b]y helping to discover where God's cause had been misinterpreted, [*Paradise Lost*] might lead to a recovery of hope and the prospect of more effective action in the future" (364). I believe that Hill's placement of theology and politics in apposition is evidence of the careful economy between the two in *Paradise Lost*, which is crucial for the functioning of the multilayered allegorical structure of the poem. If Milton teaches republicans (who are Christians) by way of theology, Hill's argument implies, then the converse is also true: that Milton can teach Christians by way of republican politics.

Himy, Armand. "Paradise Lost as a 'Tractatus Theologico-Politicus'." *Milton and Republicanism*. Eds. David Armitage, Armand Himy, and Quentin Skinner. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998. 118-134. Print.

Himy contends that, instead of republicanism *per se*, *Paradise Lost*'s political focus is on that of the "questions of government and of the source and foundation of political authority" (118). Such an argument, because of the duality that arises from *Paradise Lost*'s theological and political scope, must then be predicated on the "means Milton had of saying anything," the limitations imposed by the constraints of his "literary genre" (118). In order to address contemporary political theory through theological language, Himy argues, Milton uses a "language of accommodation," the theological precept that, while God is unknowable, his communication to man can be understood, and a language of "indirection," taking advantage of polysemy (118). These aspects allow Milton to create a "link between heaven and earth" by which government can be critiqued, while at the same time establishing a space where this critique can be achieved through multiple "levels of meaning" (119). Accommodation and indirection can show, for example, that Satan's critique of God's monarchy is patently false, while at the same time still exploring monarchy's implication in the earthly realm (120). For Milton, these two critiques are one and the same in that authority, regarding God, "is not a simple political concept," but rather the "prerequisite on which [Christian] ontology is founded," a hierarchy in which "the virtue of the subjects remains the fundamental issue" (121). A Christian commonwealth is best suited for this focus (121). What a commonwealth absent an absolute monarch entails is a conception of government centered on the freedom of the regenerate to "unify" truth, the word of God, "without... knowing exactly how truth may be

unified” (127). For Milton, this action is best performed in a Christian commonwealth because Christian liberty ultimately ends in the “abrogation of outward law” for that manifested within, available to all who fit and able to access it (134). Milton’s use of accommodation and indirection seem to me to be entirely consonant with Norbrook’s conception of republican illocution, of having a device that charts a contemporary political sphere within poetic speech. However, I think the political motive, the nullification of external law for the benefit of the internal, can be taken even farther when *Paradise Lost*’s politics are viewed allegorically.

Kahn, Victoria. “Rhetoric, Rights, and Contract Theory in the Early Modern Period.” *A Companion to Rhetoric and Rhetorical Criticism*. Eds. Walter Jost and Wendy Olmstead. Malden: Blackwell, 2006. 128-140. Print.

Victoria Kahn notes in her exploration of rhetoric’s place in contract theory the increasing importance of linguistic conventions to legal interpretation in the early modern era. In the early modern period, she contends, “we find a version of contract which emphasizes the creative role of speech acts and the constitutive power of language in shaping new rights and obligations” (129). This new conception of the social contract happens mainly through Grotius’s appropriation of Cicero’s exploration of the “relationship between language and society in contractual terms” (130). Cicero stipulates that language is both a precondition and a source of obligation: eloquence is the necessary condition for the voluntary act of entering into a contract, while language itself is the mode of this association, in that all contracts are linguistic (131). What this emphasis on the linguistic in contract theory implies, for Kahn, is that a contract must “inevitably also [be] a contract about the use of language,” and thus highlights the normative conditions of legalistic interpretation (135). This insistence on normativity stems from Grotius’s

“insight that language itself entails certain obligations,” that a contract about the “right use language” is the “precondition for all other contracts” (134). Kahn ends by making the claim that contract theory in the early modern period can be distinguished from its medieval predecessors because of the shift from a “divine” conception of obligation to one that focuses on the “rhetorical,” “constitutive” power of language— that one must be persuaded to enter into a contract “which is sustained by linguistic agreement” (137). Kahn’s essay does well to highlight the origin of an “anti-essentialist” view of language and agreement in the early modern era. I believe that Milton, who was a reader of Grotius, manifests the tension between the divine and the linguistically contractual obligation in the differing chronologies of *Paradise Lost*— Man’s obligation to God is theologically foundational and absolute in prelapsarian time, yet this foundation is, ironically, “grounded” by the necessity of postlapsarian linguistic agreement— the dialogue between Milton and the Puritan reader— about how one should correctly interpret this obligation.

Kennedy, William J. “The Epic Genre and Varieties of Form.” *Rhetorical Norms in Renaissance Literature*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1978. 128-188. Print.

Kennedy begins his argument by claiming that a theory of epic genre can be clarified by a renewed focus upon the “rhetorical strategies of voice and address,” a focus that is beneficial because it has the ability to connect “formal” and “subjective” analysis (130). Using this method, he shows that such rhetorical strategies underlie the principal attributes of epic, hortatory and demonstration (135). Epic is hortatory “when urging the contemplation and acceptance of certain values,” while it is demonstrative “when showing the consequences of heroic performance patterned upon [rhetorical strategies]” (135). Milton, Kennedy claims, has a

fundamentally problematic relationship to epic's rhetorical qualities, in that his intention to educate and his Puritan position of preelection, both of which make up the *Paradise Lost's* rhetorical strategy, "radically forecloses the possibility that the great intermediate class of mankind [i.e., those who are not of the same class, in all senses of the term, as Milton] will ever come to understand the ways of God to man" (171). Within this restricted sphere, however, Milton uses an *ethos* that, by appealing to the heavenly muse, claims complete authority over his subject matter in an act to ground his argument (173). In typical epic fashion, such a speaker functions less as a "mere agent" than as an "interpreter of the action that he portrays and mediator between it and the audience," becoming to some degree a member of the audience himself (173). I believe this account of *ethos* modifies to some degree that found in Sloane. While I still think Sloan's account of the fundamental lack of persuasion needed for the Christian cause is correct, persuasion might still be needed to control the method by which such Christians interpret *Paradise Lost*.

Luxon, Thomas H. "Not I, but Christ': The Puritan Self— Escape from Allegory?" *Literal*

Figures: Puritan Allegory and the Reformation Crisis in Representation. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1995. 1-33. Print.

Luxon contends that a theology of a Christ who is wholly separate from the earthly realm paired with a faith based on personal experience of the divine placed Puritans in a particularly troublesome state of cognitive dissonance: the contradiction inherent in the question of how to integrate a spirituality into daily life that, in the end, renounces daily life in the first place. Such a state arises from an "encouragement of an 'experimental' rather than merely 'notional' understanding of and relationship to the Word incarnate and [Puritanism's] commitment to a...

dualistic ontology” (4). This view held that a person’s physical body, being that which acts in the world, is “at worst, wholly to be despised, and, at best, an allegorical shell... of the blessings to come” (4). After the regicide in 1649, and as a result of interregnum millennial fears, various “abusers of the scripture” proclaimed either Charles I, Charles II, or (more perversely) they themselves to be Christ incarnate, engendering the criticism of succumbing to “allegorical fancies” (8). However, for Luxon, these are simply manifestations of the Puritan desire for a “God with a body, a God they could see, touch, taste and feel,” a kind of erotic need that was “heretofore suppressed as an allegory of spiritual pleasures,” which erupt[ed] in the literalized body of these radical saints” (5). As much as Puritan orthodoxy claimed otherwise, Luxon claims, such problems were the result of the doctrine of a disembodied deity, located in the “discursive body of the Word,” and the doctrine of the incarnation of that deity in Christ (5). In effect, both sides— the orthodox and the “abusers of scripture”— were accusing each other of allegorizing scripture, of not taking things literally enough. Luxon cites the case of “allegorical fancies” among “literalist” Puritan culture as a case of “hyperliteralism” (12). This shows that hyperliteralism, while mistaken in ignoring “the normative literal sense” of scripture (the “sense gathered from the explication of metaphorical figures”) in favor of the “literal sense of the... figures themselves,” ultimately reveals it as a somewhat natural tendency (12). The allegorical mode of being, that of the earth standing as simply a shadow of the divine, while troublesome, will only be done away with (he quotes Paul) “on the day of the *Parousia*” (14). In this sense, the radicals’ religious logic was valid, even if their “sense of timing” was not (14). This argument serves as evidence of a general “competence” in the language of allegory of the radical populace at large, crucial for my conception of how Milton “finds” his readership. Also, it supports my claim that allegory needs to be sustained for *Paradise Lost* to do what Fish claims:

as he asserts, a “direct” method of ascertaining the correctness of one’s spiritual knowledge will exist only after the Second Coming.

Norbrook, David. “Introduction: Acts of Oblivion and Republican Speech-Acts.” *Writing the English Republic: Poetry, Rhetoric and Politics, 1627-1660*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000. 1-22. Print.

One of the chief concerns of Norbrook’s book is to “[remove] canonical writers like Milton and Marvell from their timeless pantheon and [look] at the poems as they were first composed or circulated” (9). Doing this, Norbrook contends, allows the critic “to view literary texts in the context of social rhetoric,” and by doing so reveals the “parallels between artistic and political representation: republican politics produced by a republican poetics” (9-10). Citing the pervasive influence of “anti-humanist” theorists of republican-inspired literature and these theorists’ restricted, “passive” approach to politics under the heading of unconscious ideology, Norbrook contends that a “more dynamic” model is needed (10). Such a model, Norbrook argues (inspired by Habermas’s use of speech act theory in his *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*), can be found in the “‘speech-act theory’ or ‘pragmatics’ derived from J. L. Austin,” which is “concerned with the links between language and action” (10). The theoretical potential of this approach lies (paraphrasing Quentin Skinner) in the need of “[theorists of English republicanism] to analyze not only [writing’s] cognitive content... but the kinds of ‘illocutionary act’ the author was performing in publishing [his or her work]” (10). This approach amounts to a careful consideration of how an author “was intervening in a contemporary context of debate” (10). For example, if one properly understands the climate of English republicanism and its downfall, the “gloomy lines from Book XII” of *Paradise Lost*

were designed to instigate his republican audience, rather than “undermine any faith in human action” (11). Another point of clarification is to realize the role language played in the nascent revolution, that for Protestants to be able to access the Truth through free interchange of ideas and the Word “it was necessary to diminish the power of religious and civil monopolies of truth” (14). In this sense, [l]inguistic change and political change went hand in hand” (17). For my purposes, I cannot overstate the importance of Norbrook’s account of republican illocution, given greater detail in my annotation to his chapter on *Paradise Lost* below. Along with Hill, who does well to supply the climate of English republicanism at the time of *Paradise Lost*’s writing, this is one of the more important sources for linking the language of the poem to an allegorical political critique.

Norbrook, David. “*Paradise Lost* and English Republicanism.” *Writing the English Republic: Poetry, Rhetoric and Politics, 1627-1660*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000. 433-495. Print.

This chapter focuses on the use of speech-acts and how they function to align Milton’s republican rhetoric to the political circumstance of the civil war. Satan’s republican speech serves as a critique of republicanism, not because Heaven is a monarchy, but rather in the fact that “the language of liberty is... exploited by him in speech-acts that magnify his personal power” in a monarchical way (446). The illocutionary tension behind his rhetoric is a result of seeing it in the context of the precariousness of republican language in the hands of those who would misuse it (446). This tension sets the stage for later linguistic “imbalances” by which a character’s status can be evaluated by whom or what he is speaking for or against in the public sphere (473). This “public sphere” is particularly applicable to edenic interpretation, where

“faith in God is complimented by... an effective understanding of language,” based on a “common interest in shared communication” (484). One implication of this argument is that for the fit, politicized reader, such republican rhetoric and speech acts become instantiations of the relevance of the political allegory of the poem, which is in turn necessary for the negation of this allegory’s by Milton’s placing of it in a theologically cosmic context that overshadows it. The poem is, in this way, political only insofar as such politics can serve as a negative example of the theological.

Olbrechts-Tyteca, L., and Chaïm Perelman. “The Universal Audience.” *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation*. Trans. John Wilkinson and Purcell Weaver. Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame P, 2010. 31-35. Print.

Olbrechts-Tyteca and Perelman define the “universal audience” as one whose “universality [is] imagined by the speaker” (31). This imagined universality stems from the belief held by the speaker that the argument in question “does not admit any question” and thus “must convince the reader that” the argument is “self-evident, and posses[es] an absolute and timeless validity, independent of local or historical contingencies” (they cite philosophers as exemplars of this) (32). Because of these qualities of the argument, the speaker “think[s] that all who understand the reasons they give will have to accept their conclusions (31). Thus rhetoric, as defined in the case of the universal audience, is a “maximally efficacious rhetoric... is rhetoric applying nothing but logical proof” (32). However, Olbrechts-Tyteca and Perelman contend, this line of argumentation is “hazardous” because (citing Vilfredo Pareto) the “universal consensus invoked is often merely the unwarranted generalization of an individual intuition,” and also because what counts as objective criteria for argumentation varies according to time period and/or culture (33).

And because of the fact that the imagined universal audience always shows preference on the part of the speaker for a specific group, which manifests itself in the form of the “elite audience” against whom the “universal audience must be set” and who are “endowed with exceptional and infallible means of knowledge” (33). A speaker also invokes the universal audience, even though it is an abstract term, to apply it to a “concrete universality” (the audience as it actually exists) in order to find out both the composition of that audience and the criteria it finds legitimate (34-35). In this way, “it can be said that audiences pass judgment on one another” (35). This is a fascinating account of audience engagement that I find very applicable to both Fish and Milton; Fish seeks to have one audience “pass judgment” on another in that he has the present interpretive culture govern what is legitimate to glean from Milton, while Milton can be said to invoke an “elite audience” (radical republicans) by which he can critique the wider English society’s godliness.

Rorty, Richard. “The Invention of the Mind.” *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1980. 17-69. Print.

In this chapter of his seminal work, Rorty analyzes the various presuppositions of philosophy that have led to the modern concept of the mind. Though richly various, the section most applicable to my analysis is Rorty’s approach to intentionality and phenomenology. If intentionality, as a nonmaterial state, can only be ascribed to “phenomenal items,” those items that are “directly before the mind,” then the world can be “divided into things whose nature is exhausted by how they appear and things whose nature is not (27-30). This only allows the philosopher to describe the mind by way of the particularizing of a universal property (e.g., instead of “pain” being the experience of a person, it is an immaterial category of “mind-stuff”)

— a “particular whose nature is exhausted by a single property” (30). The mind-body distinction is thus “parasitic on the universal-particular distinction, rather than conversely” (31). If the “grasp of universals” resulting from this analysis becomes the sole criterion of the mental, then radically different “events” such as intentions (which are not phenomenal) and sensations (which are) can be grouped under one rubric (51-54). I think this account of universal concepts being distinct from particular phenomena can illuminate the problems with Fish’s affective stylistics, and also account in part for his later move to interpretive communities. Fish supposes that each particular phenomenal experience (“event”) of the language of *Paradise Lost* is congruent with a universal action of the work: to tempt the Puritan reader. I believe the later Fish reverses this conception as a result of coming to a similar understanding as Rorty, and must have a universal such as “temptation” be the thing that acts on, and is therewith tested by, the interpretation of a phenomenal experience, rather than the converse.

Shore, Daniel. “Why Milton Is Not an Iconoclast.” *PMLA* 127.1 (2012): 22-37. Print.

Shore revises what he perceives as the popular misconception among Miltonists that Milton was an unambiguous iconoclast; that is, a person who completely destroys the image in contest. By exploring the fact that to write about idolatry Milton had to in a large sense preserve those idols that are to be critiqued, Shore imputes Milton’s poetry as having to “preserve what it opposes” in order to justify such oppositions (25). This action is the result of the use of the rhetorical device of *controversia*, that “controversial writing faithfully reproduces and disseminates the arguments it aims to refute,” in effect presenting both sides equally (25). This is partly due to Milton’s anxiety over the traditional iconoclast’s emphasis on physical destruction rather than spiritual disposition: the “triumph [of iconoclasm] is not achieved through physical violence or

destruction,” but rather “through [Christ’s] mere presence in the world” (24). Shore quotes Milton, that it is a fundamental mistake of iconoclasts “who imagin to remove sin by removing the matter of sin” (30). However, Milton, still being against idolatry, would not avoid addressing idols, and thus Shore identifies *epicrisis* (defined as “to pass judgment on”) as the device that supplants *controversia* in his poetry (27). Yet *epicrisis* is “largely the product of the conditions of *controversia*: one must quote in order to refute” (27). In *Paradise Lost*, Milton leaves intact “idols such as Mulciber, Belial, and Satan at the height of their aesthetic and rhetorical appeal” only to place “behind this force the whole of his poetic care”: the “capacity for resistance” that Milton’s epicritical mode, by its passive distance, imbues in the reader (34). In this mode, “[a]n idol is made available for scanning [Milton’s word for searching for error], but we are at least partly sheltered from its seductiveness by accompanying criticism” (34). Shore’s argument is a powerful one against the “seductive” reading of *Paradise Lost* given by Fish, in addition to Sloane’s favoring of *dispositio* over *controversia* in Milton’s poetry. However, I do not believe that a reader can be sheltered from idol-worship when that idol is part of the reader’s makeup, as it is with the republican, “revolutionary” reader and the English republic. If *controversia* or *epicrisis* exist in *Paradise Lost*, in my conception, they exist in either a provisional manner, and therefore within the network of temptation that Fish has set up.

Simpson, Ken. “Rhetoric and Revelation: Milton’s Use of *Sermo* in *De Doctrina Christiana*.”

Studies in Philology 96.3 (1999): 334-347. Print.

Simpson analyzes the connection between *sermo*, the idea of the revelation of God’s word as a kind of discourse (as opposed to the more direct *verbum*), and Milton’s conception of imperfect revelation based in anti-trinitarian views. If the Word that is made manifest in Christ is an

indirect revelation of God's original Word, the two are not one and the same (338). Simpson notes that in *De Doctrina Christiana*, "the essence or intention of the Father is never fully revealed in his Son any more than an author's intention... in a speech or text" (339). This incomplete revelation occurs because God and the Son are related as "speaker to speech," rather than as structuralist conceptions of "language (*langue*) to speech (*parole*)" that informed previous discourse on Milton's use of *sermo* (338). This emphasis on a divine speaker necessitates "Milton's construction of revelation as a speech act [on the part of God]" (341). In the end, the metaphor of the Word for the act of revelation entails a theologically "rhetorical relationship between author, speech, and audience," in which the "literary and theological Milton are impossible to separate" (346). By extending this conception of God's imperfect act of revelation to an "audience" to Norbrook's own conception of political speech acts, the fictional God of *Paradise Lost* must curiously occupy the Son's place in Milton's theology: he is the manifested "Word" of a republican, albeit theologically-informed, political ideology.

Sloane, Thomas O. "Miltonic Form." *Donne, Milton, and the End of Humanist Rhetoric*.

Berkeley: U of California P, 1985. 209-278. Print.

Sloane explores what he claims to be the "disintegration" of a "humanist rhetoric," defined as *controversia*, or disputative discourse, in Milton. *Controversia*, Sloane explains, is "displaced [in Milton] by a confidence in the availability of truth and in one's access to truth through *forms*" (211). In Milton's poetry, particularly in *Paradise Lost*, there are not "two alternatives," as in the humanist disputative rhetoric, but rather "one possibility"—Christian truth—arrived at through *dispositio*, the formalistic act of organizing one's argument so as to make truth available (213-215). This is the action that allows Milton to "show us how to read the entire poem... from

the perspective of the poet, the creator” (213). By this action, Milton restricts the argument of the poem to a revelation that is “conceptual” rather than rhetorical, in that the poem uses “form as a mode of thought” to convey its argument, rather than emotional effect (214). In using this method of argument, Milton creates a “prophetic ethos,” that, while interested in the argument, is not “*personalist*” (214). This is a position strongly influenced by Ramism, particularly the Ramist dictum that “knowledge is impersonal,” and that such knowledge is conveyed by proper configuration, or form (220). Whereas the rhetorician holds that content (in this case, knowledge) and form are inseparable, in that the latter is the effect of the former and thus of lesser importance in rhetorical strategy, Milton, like the Ramists, believed content to be the operative factor in discourse (224). Milton, rather than appealing emotionally to fallen humanity, is more concerned with “training” fallen reason through a carefully laid-out argument (230). I think that a discussion of this kind of post-humanist formal argument is essential to viewing the allegorical structure of *Paradise Lost* for what it is: a teaching device aimed at degenerate reason. Certitude in the absence of *controversia* is crucial in restricting the interpretation of the Puritan audience Milton addresses.

Sloane, Thomas O. “Rhetorical Selfhood in Erasmus and Milton.” *A Companion to Rhetoric and Rhetorical Criticism*. Eds. Walter Jost and Wendy Olmstead. Malden: Blackwell, 2006. 113-127. Print.

In his article, Thomas Sloane explores the anxiety inherent in the Christian humanist, resulting from a paradoxical reverence for the pagan classics while being well aware of their status in a Christian cosmos. Sloane argues that Erasmus and Milton resolve this tension by resorting to what in classical rhetoric is defined as *ethos*, the careful consideration of “a range of speaker

audience relationships” that allows the speaker (or, in this case, author) to make himself “attractive... to the particular audience he seeks. (113-14). *Ethos* is what makes up “rhetorical selfhood” (115). He quotes J.S. Baumlín’s description of *ethos* as “character as it emerges in language,” which is essential to my exploration of the charting of Christian character in Milton as it relates to both the author and his characters (113). For both Erasmus and Milton, the *ethos* to be imitated is Christ, however Milton’s position regarding syncretistic possibilities of humanism and Christianity is far less inclusive than that found in Erasmus (115). While Milton both practiced and preached civic duty, his commitment to Christian truth gave him a great confidence that true eloquence “does not arise from traditional rhetoric,” but rather the inward, solitary “love of truth,” of the manifestation of the divine that is internal to the self (121). Milton’s *ethos*, therefore, is really a lack of *ethos* in its traditional sense. For Sloane, solitary interpretation is that which identifies Milton as a Puritan, rather than a humanist author, insofar as his reader is alert to the “Miltonic lesson that no understanding is available through image alone or without the Spirit” (125). Without this Spirit, his readers “will fail [to understand him], purposely so” (125). Milton’s poetry, then, arises more from an internal spiritual dialogue, as well as from the instigation of the Puritan reader to do the same. Rorty’s conception of the universal, as with Fish, is applicable here as well. A discriminating mind no longer bound to outward phenomena for correct interpretation — a condition that is the essence of Milton’s conception of Spirit— is at the heart of Milton’s commitment to Christian truth; a holy disposition, like an intention, is not a “phenomenal item.”

Teskey, Gordon. “From Allegory to Dialectic: Imagining Error in Spenser and Milton.” *PMLA* 101.1 (1986): 9-23. Print.

Teskey makes the claim that Spenser depicts error as allegorical due to ambiguity arising from *The Faerie Queene*'s appropriation of a quest narrative, while Milton stringently depicts error and the right path as wholly separate with no room for allegorical ambiguity. In *The Faerie Queene*, "error is represented *diagetically*," which in this case means portraying the meaning of the work through actions of character told to the reader "in all the various forms offered by narrative romance" (9). Milton, however, represents error "*dialectically*, as the negation of all that is good": *Paradise Lost* "turns on one catastrophic act of negation" (9). Teskey supports this argument by examining the theological strictures of prelapsarian existence: since before the Fall Eden cannot harbor the existence of error, the only error possible is the negation of the good (9). Citing Fish, Teskey observes that, rather than becoming "entangled" in narrative, the reader of *Paradise Lost* becomes entangled in the "rhetoric of sin" (10). It is by this move that Milton is able to both explore the "general psychology of choice" divorced from the "practical circumstances of everyday life" (10). Milton, always conscious of freedom, avoids diegesis—which would amount to the explication of the right choice through allegorical symbolism revealed by the narrator's interpretation of action—in favor of enacting a psychology of choice in the dialogues of Adam, Eve, and Satan with both each other and themselves (10-11). In Spenser, moral deviation is most often represented allegorically by the physical act of deviating from the path; Milton would oppose such a "general statement of meaning" (12). In order to avoid this "subordination of a literal narrative to its figurative meaning, Milton refuses allegory" by refusing to use its form: the separation of "technique" and "fact" (16). Milton avoids the "tutelary genius of allegory" by attempting to "recreate" (evidenced by his invocations to the holy muse) the past unambiguously by way of his correct interpretation of the spirit within (20). While I agree that Milton is decidedly not creating an allegory out of action, and am in debt to

Teskey for his outline of Milton's distaste for traditional allegory, I believe Teskey is premature in diagnosing Milton's complete abandonment of the allegorical mode. By restricting allegory to physical action standing figuratively for moral error, he does not explore the possibility that the Fall may have multiple internal "modes" of error-making (to a Puritan such as Milton, such internal modes, or psychological orientations, are all that matter) that may exist both inside and outside the poem. Norbrook shows that a republican reader can be engaged by rhetoric couched in theological speech; extending the figural to cover the engagement of illocution and a contemporary republican circumstance is, in my opinion, not too far a leap.