

TRUTH'S ARMOURY: RHETORICAL *ETHOS* IN JOHN MILTON'S *AREOPAGITICA* AND
PARADISE LOST

by

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(Under the Direction of CHRISTY DESMET)

ABSTRACT

While John Milton's work attends to many issues incendiary in seventeenth-century politics, one concern persists across his career: language's potential either to reveal truth or conceal falsity. Beginning with the proposition that Milton believes truth and eloquence are inextricable, this thesis argues that *Areopagitica*'s truth metaphors represent an idealized *ethos* that orators should possess. Conceptualizing how Milton's truth might exemplify a rhetorical *ethos*, the first chapter argues that Milton's truth dwells as much within those who seek it as it is an object to be sought. The second and third chapters argue that Milton critiques the Renaissance affinity for sophistry and its deleterious effects on communication through Books 2 and 9 by showing persuasive acts neither guided by nor searching for Milton's truth.

INDEX WORDS: John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, *Areopagitica*, Aristotle, Augustine; Isocrates, Rhetoric, Ethos, Truth, Gorgias, Sophistry.

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DEDICATION

For always encouraging me in my scholarly pursuits, I dedicate this to my grandparents James
and Merrell Garner and Roger and Mary Donathan.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER	
1 WITH DUST AND HEAT: TRUTH AS <i>ETHOS</i> IN <i>AREOPAGITICA</i>	18
2 “FIRM FAITH, AND FIRM ACCORD / MORE THAN CAN BE IN HEAV’N”: THE DEVILS’ COUNCIL AND THE <i>ETHOS</i> OF CONFORMITY.....	43
3 SERPENT TONGUE: GORGIAS AND SOPHISTRY IN <i>PARADISE LOST</i>	58
CONCLUSION.....	92
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	94

INTRODUCTION

A curious moment occurs in John Milton's *Areopagitica* (1644)¹ in which the treatise that has been about overturning the 1643 Licensing Order's severe censorship of newly published books suddenly changes its focus. Milton's discussion moves from excoriating licensure's past failures to articulating less effable concerns: the origin of truth and how its proliferation will be damaged by the order. Because Milton's ostensible purpose in the pamphlet is to defend free speech, his concept of truth is inimical to licensing. Stanley Fish, in *How Milton Works*, observes the shift in Milton's argument, suggesting that it indicates Milton's lack of interest in book licensure and free speech. Fish argues that the polemic's purpose is to show how "truth," a rather difficult-to-quantify concept in the piece, is contained within, expressed through, and discerned by fallen human beings.² Even if Fish perhaps overstates Milton's lack of interest in licensure and free speech, his point is well taken and one from which this thesis will proceed. Milton's truth in *Areopagitica* and *Paradise Lost* is about more than a free press or uninhibited debate. It is also deeply entwined with his anxieties about language's possibilities for oratorical malfeasance and the seventeenth-century rebirth of the art of sophistry.

Ten years after writing *Areopagitica*, Milton retrospectively appraised his aims for that pamphlet in *The Second Defense of the English People* (1653). He writes that he composed *Areopagitica*

¹ All quotations from Milton's prose works cited from John Milton, *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, eds. Don Wolfe, et al, 8 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953-1982) and cited as *CPW* by volume and page number.

² Stanley Fish, *How Milton Works* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 205.

... to deliver the press from the restraints with which it was encumbered; that the power of determining what was true and what was false, what ought to be published and what to be suppressed, might no longer be entrusted to a few illiterate and illiberal individuals, who refused their sanction to any work which contained views or sentiments at all above the level of vulgar superstition. (*CPW* 4.831)

This is a telling explanation of his work. He provides the reader with his purpose (“to deliver the press from the restraints with which it was encumbered”) and then articulates his arguments from the pamphlet. “What ought to be published and what to be suppressed” and the relative clause, “who refused their sanction to any work which contained views or sentiments at all above the level of vulgar superstition,” referring to the “illiterate and illiberal individuals,” interrupt his main sentence. If we remove them from the sentence, Milton’s primary method of unshackling the press is by ensuring “that the power of determining what was true and what was false might no longer be entrusted to a few illiterate and illiberal individuals.” What truth means to Milton is difficult to quantify, but *Areopagitica* provides us with some clues, and this moment from *The Second Defense* is revealing. His purpose in that pamphlet is not only to promote free speech or unrestricted printing but to help his readers cultivate the ability to discern truth from falsity. Milton was attempting to transfer the power of determining the true from the false from the hands of the few to, if not all people, more than would have been able to had the Licensure Order gone unchallenged. By presenting his purpose in *Areopagitica* as not only the overturning of licensure but also the defense of truth, Milton’s spiritual concerns inform and deepen his political engagement.

Milton's *Areopagitica* unfolds in four arguments that gradually build on one another, culminating in his lengthy excursus on truth. In the tract's first argument, Milton traces licensure's origins to the Catholic Church, the "inventors...whom ye will be loath to own," and clearly a problem for Protestant Milton and the presbytery comprising the Assembly to which the tract is to be delivered (*CPW* 2.491). In its second argument, the pamphlet queries the value of reading in general, concluding that while biblical precedent states that the reading of many books is wearisome, it is not necessarily forbidden by ecclesiastical law, and thus licensure should not be upheld (*CPW* 2.514). Because Milton finds licensure at odds with biblical and historical dictates on reading, he counts it among the Catholic Church's more dangerous innovations. In the tract's penultimate argument, he declares licensure utterly useless. The Licensing Order, he declares, "avails nothing to the suppressing of scandalous, seditious, and libelous books"—that is, licensing will ultimately prove ineffectual (*CPW* 2.491). But then the book turns in its argument and moves from the pragmatic to the transcendental to argue that licensure will result in "the stop of Truth, not only by disexercising and blunting our abilities in what we know already, but by hindring and cropping discovery that might bee yet further made both in religious and civill Wisdome" (*CPW* 2.492).

This final part—Milton's suggestion that the "stop of Truth" will hinder and crop discourse in civil and religious matters— is the main province of my present work. Deeply invested in this declaration is the idea that the suppression of free discourse and discussion will keep truth from proliferating through meaningful dialogue. In addition to that significant moment, this project began after encountering two other noteworthy passages in Milton's work.

First, just two years before he penned *Areopagitica*, Milton writes in *An Apology against a Pamphlet* (1642):

Yet true eloquence I find to be none but the serious and hearty love of truth: And that whose mind so ever is fully possest with a fervent desire to know good things, with the dearest charity to infuse the knowledge of them into others, when such a man would speak, his words (by what I can expresse) like so many nimble and airy servitors trip about him at command, and in well order'd files, as he would wish, fall aptly into their own places. (*CPW* 1.949)

For Milton, the “serious and hearty love of truth” and “a fervent desire to know good things” are what determine eloquence more than one’s facility with speech. If a speaker is motivated by truth, then the words will “in well order’d files, as he would wish, fall aptly into their own places.” In addition to Milton’s suggestion that, at least ideally, truth empowers eloquence, among the many metaphors that Milton employs to describe truth, one in *Areopagitica* is unusual. Where Milton tries to delineate what he means by truth by comparing it to a virginal warrior, the dismembered god Osiris, and a flowing stream, among many other metaphors, Milton also describes how error will only serve to polish “the armoury of Truth” (*CPW* 2.567). Taken with his statement on eloquence and truth, we can see that Milton is personally invested in and concerned with what motivates people to speak, and, perhaps equally important, *how* they speak and the consequences of that speech. His idea of truth is inextricable from eloquence—to seek truth, one must be able to eloquently engage in discourse. For Milton, to speak eloquently, one must be oriented toward truth, and if one is truthful, one is always already eloquent. When

Milton talks about truth in *Areopagitica*, then, he is always concerned with how and for what purpose people speak.

Because truth is expressed through words, Milton is limited to capturing truth's fluctuating form through fallible human language. He writes of truth in such a way that it is difficult to determine precisely what it is, where it is located, and what he means by it. Because "truth" is a slippery word, like "nature" or "love," that requires much defining and upon which no one will likely ever agree precisely on its meaning, Milton's only recourse is to depict his vision of truth in a way that will make it understandable to his audience: through metaphor. These metaphors have provided Milton scholars with a wealth of interpretive opportunities in trying to figure out what Milton's truth "means."³ I would like to present another way of thinking about them: Milton's metaphors for truth in *Areopagitica* are not necessarily attempts to capture what truth *is* so much as what the "hearty love of truth" can inspire in speakers; they provide models for the truth-seeker to emulate in discourse. Because for Milton truth can only be discerned through active discourse, Milton's truth in *Areopagitica* can be read as a way of

³ In formulating this idea, I am shifting and expanding the work of a number of formidable scholars who all argue that Milton's "truth" in *Areopagitica* is not necessarily about truth as an object but as a state of mind, which I suggest may be read as theory of *ethos*. Some insightful works to consult are Lana Cable, *Carnal Rhetoric: Milton's Iconoclasm and the Poetics of Desire* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 117-143, in which she argues that Milton's truth is "a mode of discovery" and that his metaphors for truth emblemize an "creative iconoclasm," an artistic power that refuses to let us forget that his characterizations of truth are simply figurative. My study was also inspired by James S. Baumlin, *Theologies of Language in Renaissance Literature* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012), 193-197, in which the author claims that Milton establishes within the treatise a "prophetic *ethos*" by his invocation of Isocrates as a model for oratory in the piece's exordium and then argues that Milton merges this *ethos* with the prophetic *ethos* of the Hebrew prophets. Where I differ from Baumlin here is focusing my study on Milton's *ethos* as constructed not by his appeals to older prophets and their ideas on teaching but rather in his numerous and vibrant metaphors for truth. See also Fish, "Driving from the Letter": Truth and Indeterminacy in Milton's *Areopagitica*," in *How Milton Works*, 187-214. In this chapter, Fish claims that the way Milton "works" is not by persuasion but by testimony (an argument Baumlin takes up as "witness"), and he suggests in this chapter that Milton is more interested in teaching his audience how to seek truth than defending free speech or books, as I have mentioned elsewhere. What this means is that Milton's truth is shifting, protean, and never within reach because of man's impurity (214). Fish keeps this argument locked firmly within the realm of the spiritual and abstract, whereas I hope to bring it into the pragmatic realm as Milton's project in *Areopagitica* becomes to construct a rhetorical *ethos* rooted in the search for truth contra the sophistic impulses of Renaissance oratory.

understanding his views of what James S. Baumlin terms “right rhetoric”—rhetoric whose aim is to persuade not by deception but by convincing the hearer of truth.⁴ Accordingly, Milton’s truth in *Areopagitica* may be read as a guide toward a rhetorical *ethos* that instructs its readers to assume truth as a kind of armor for engaging in rhetorical combat. Because language is so malleable and pliant, getting truth “right” becomes more difficult, and that is the paradox of the piece. Through metaphor, Milton depicts truth as both end and means. It is a virgin warrior, a building being constructed, and a flowing stream. It is purest gold. It is armour to be refined in the heat of battle. Because Milton casts truth as eloquence and eloquence as truth, the eloquent speaker will take the messages Milton wants to convey in these metaphors as a model to view rhetoric. Ultimately, I will argue that Milton presents these models to construct an *ethos* in opposition to the sophistic impulse prevalent in Renaissance oratory, the consequences of which he later dramatizes through scenes of debate and argumentation in his biblical epic *Paradise Lost* (1667).⁵

In Greek, *ethos* means “custom” or “habit” but is often translated as “character,” that is, the character of the speaker.⁶ Another important way the word is often defined is through its original meaning of “accustomed place.” To think of *ethos* as a habit or custom, but also as the accustomed place—a place in which to dwell—provides us with a starting point for how we might think of Milton’s truth as rhetorical *ethos*. Owing to Milton’s voluminous education both in school and in the private period of study his father funded, he had an opportunity to read

⁴ Baumlin, *Theologies of Language*, 194.

⁵ All quotations from *Paradise Lost* cited from John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (Norton Critical Edition Series, Third Edition), ed. Gordon Teskey (New York: Norton, 2005) and cited as *PL*.

⁶ *The Liddell-Scott-Jones Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. “Ethos,” (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996). <http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/lsg/#eid=1974&context=search> (accessed March 28, 2014).

widely, especially the writings of the ancient Greek and Roman philosophers.⁷ His capacious studies afforded him the chance to study three philosophers, especially, who seem to have influenced his ideas of rhetoric and truth: Isocrates, Aristotle, and St. Augustine of Hippo.

The Contingency of Isocratean Truth

Isocrates is, perhaps, the thinker most antithetical to Milton's truth in *Areopagitica*, but he is no less important as an influence. While Donald Lemen Clark suggests that the Milton who composed *Areopagitica* is an orator-statesman in the mode of Isocrates, the two figures are united in occupation but certainly not in ideology.⁸ If we take one of Milton's projects in the pamphlet to be advocating free speech, his title's allusion to Isocrates's oration to the Areopagus becomes ironic. Isocrates's task is to "reform Athenian morals by reinstating censorship over citizens' activities," whereas Milton insists that even books of dubious moral and spiritual character have merit and can advance the search for truth.⁹ Although Isocrates has been identified as a sophist, it should be noted that his rhetorical program does proceed from a love of wisdom, and he did not consider himself a sophist in the popular pejorative sense. In *Against the Sophists*, Isocrates carefully distinguishes himself from the much-maligned, avaricious teachers who taught political speech without "a concern for the truth" but instead "think that their art consists of attracting as many students as possible by the smallness of their fees and the

⁷ For an exhaustive account of Milton's education, see Barbara K. Lewalski, *The Life of John Milton* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 20-21;65. Lewalski's detailing of Milton's Cambridge studies, especially, contends that he would have known Aristotle's work on rhetoric. During Milton's period of private study, from approximately 1635-1641, he undertook a survey of the Greek and Roman philosophers for at least a few of these years, as well.

⁸ Donald Lemen Clark, *John Milton at St. Paul's School: A Study of Ancient Rhetoric in Renaissance Education* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1948), 8.

⁹ Lewalski, 105.

grandness of their instruction and of being able to earn something from them.”¹⁰ Isocrates also argues that a speaker’s *ethos* is critical to how the speaker is received by an audience: “Who could fail to know that speeches seem truer when spoken by those of good name than by the disreputable, and that arguments acquire more authority when they come from one’s life than from mere words.”¹¹ Although Milton might have agreed with Isocrates on these ideas, he would have been dismayed by Isocrates’s concept of truth as constructed by man.

While truth as Milton describes it in *Areopagitica* is relative, it exists; the great puzzle for Milton is not its existence but whether humans are sufficient to understand it. Isocrates, on the other hand, has views of *ethos* that are inextricable from his understanding of truth, but that truth is constructed rather than stable: “Since human nature cannot attain knowledge that would enable us to know what we must say or do, after this I think that the wise are those who have the ability to reach the best opinions most of the time....”¹² As Michael J. Hyde writes, “For Isocrates, *ethos* is both a legitimating source for and a praiseworthy effect of the ethical practice of the orator’s art. Isocrates advances this claim as he abides by the sophistic, and thus anti-Platonic, thesis that, owing to the contingency of human existence, ‘truth’ is at best grasped in terms of ‘probabilities’; uncertainty is always a given.”¹³ Truth, for Milton, can be *described* in many ways, but even when it appears in different forms, it is not, he says in *Areopagitica*, unlike itself

¹⁰ Isocrates, *Against the Sophists*, in *The Oratory of Classical Greece, Vol 4: Isocrates I*, trans. David Mirhady and Yun Lee Too, ed. Michael Gagarin (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), 62.

¹¹ Isocrates, *Antidosis*, in *The Oratory of Classical Greece, Vol. 4: Isocrates I*, 278.

¹² *Ibid.*, 271.

¹³ Michael J. Hyde, “Introduction,” in *The Ethos of Rhetoric*, eds. Michael J. Hyde and Calvin O. Schrag (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2004), xv.

(*CPW* 2.563). Because their views of truth differ so dramatically, Isocrates becomes a model for Milton of how not to speak about truth.

Aristotelian Ethos

As Lewalski has pointed out, with Milton's formative education in the Greek classics, he also had the opportunity to study Aristotle, whose ideas about *ethos* seem to have influenced Milton. Aristotle expounds a more ontological approach to *ethos*—that is, *ethos* exists within human speakers, whether by birth or by gaining it through external circumstances. Aristotle's explanation of the origin of *ethos* is varied and spread across his works, but by looking especially at his *On Rhetoric* and *Nicomachean Ethics*, we can begin to understand *ethos* as something innate to each speaker that can be modified by external conditions. *On Rhetoric*, especially, suggests that rhetoricians should be able to assess the characteristic temperaments and natures of audiences; it ascribes these temperaments to various stages of life. For example, Aristotle claims the young are prone to fits of passion and respond to displays of high intensity and emotion.¹⁴ Some effects of character, writes Aristotle, derive from happenstance, some from wealth, and some from possessing power. Each characteristic has a different effect on a speaker's *ethos* and dictates the way speakers approach situations. Speakers possessing power, writes Aristotle, will be "more earnest, because of being in a position of responsibility, forced to keep an eye on everything that relates to their power."¹⁵ He takes a negative view toward the wealthy, reproving them as "ostentatious and pretentious" and prone to conspicuous displays of luxury; accordingly, this affects their character, especially if they are recently wealthy as opposed to coming from

¹⁴ Aristotle, *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*, trans. George S. Kennedy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 1389a.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 1391a.

money.¹⁶ Aristotle's examples seem to suggest that he believes *ethos* can be modified by external factors, as well as innate. For him, a speaker's *ethos* necessarily affects engagement with the audience, such that speakers of certain *ethos* will not resonate with audiences. Although his descriptions of the original location of *ethos* are often vague in *On Rhetoric*, we can infer either that *ethos* is granted from birth or that external influences can modify the *ethos* of the speaker.

Because the text of *On Rhetoric* is itself incomplete, the origin of *ethos*, as Aristotle's theories of character in *On Rhetoric* suggest, is somewhat open to interpretation; however, Aristotle's understanding of *ethos* as a quality inherent within the speaker becomes clearer when these ideas are extrapolated from the *Nicomachean Ethics*. While the rhetorician must be mindful of an audience's age, as he says in *On Rhetoric*, Aristotle also writes that certain kinds of *ethos* are not contingent on age or maturity: "And it makes no difference at all whether he is young in age or immature in character: the deficiency is not related to time but instead arises on account of living in accord with passion and pursuing each passion in turn. For to people of that sort, just as to those lacking self-restraint, knowledge is without benefit."¹⁷ He also writes of shame: "It is not fitting to speak about a sense of shame as a particular virtue, for it seems more like a passion than a characteristic."¹⁸ The distinction here between a "passion" and a "characteristic" is that external conditions arouse passions while characteristics dwell within speakers. *Ethos*'s indwelling becomes clearer in the *Nicomachean Ethics* when discussing character traits in general: "For all people are of the opinion that each of the several characters is in some way

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Robert C. Bartlett and Susan D. Collins (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 1095a7-10.

¹⁸ Ibid., 1128b10-14.

present by nature: we are just, inclined to be moderate, and are courageous and the rest, immediately from birth.”¹⁹ These passages and those from *On Rhetoric* suggest that a person’s *ethos* begins as an inherent trait, but changes depending upon what sorts of external factors with which it comes into contact.

Augustine and the Wisdom of Eloquence

In addition to the Greek rhetoricians and their theories of *ethos*, St. Augustine of Hippo’s analysis of rhetoric in *On Christian Doctrine* strikingly resembles Milton’s elucidation of truth’s relationship to eloquence. Arguing that Milton envisioned himself a “rhetorician in Augustine’s terms,” Lewalski quotes the previously mentioned lines from *An Apology*, in which Milton calls “the serious and hearty love of truth” the genesis of true eloquence.²⁰ As that line is key to this study, exploring Augustine’s conception of truth might clarify Milton’s views on the relationship between truth and rhetoric. Augustine writes:

Now, the art of rhetoric being available for the enforcing either of truth or falsehood, who will dare say that truth in the person of its defenders is to take its stand unarmed against falsehood? For example, that those who are trying to persuade men of what is false are to know how to introduce their subject, so as to put the hearer into a friendly, or attentive, or teachable frame of mind, while the defenders of the truth shall be ignorant of their art? That the former are to tell their falsehoods briefly, clearly, and plausibly, while the latter shall tell the truth in such a way that is tedious to listen to, hard to understand, and, in fine, not easy to

¹⁹ Ibid., 1144b5-8.

²⁰ Lewalski, 137.

believe it? That the former are to oppose the truth and defend falsehood with
sophistical arguments, while the latter shall be unable either to defend what is
true, or to refute what is false? That the former, while imbuing their hearers with
erroneous opinions, are by the power of speech to awe, to melt, to enliven, and to
rouse them, while the latter shall in defense of the truth be sluggish, and frigid,
and somnolent? Who is such a fool as to think this wisdom?²¹

These lines from Book 4 of *On Christian Doctrine* could almost have been penned by Milton while he was writing *An Apology* and *Areopagitica*. There are several key points in this passage that merit consideration. First, note Augustine's description of truth as being "in the person of its defenders." Truth is not only the thing being defended, but it also empowers the rhetorician combatting falsity. Augustine's suggestion resembles Milton's belief that eloquence and truth are coterminous, residing within the speaker. Second, Augustine suggests that training in rhetoric, despite the possibility of its abuse, should not be forbidden to the rhetorician who seeks to defend truth. Indeed, rhetorical training is not only commendable but a necessity for defending truth from sophistic influence. Third, Augustine desires to make truth understood and coherent, in contrast to the sophistic arguments of those rhetoricians who "oppose the truth and defend falsehood"—he is, as Milton would later claim in *The Second Defense*, trying to put the discernment of truth and falsehood into the hands of everyone rather than simply a few. Finally, for Augustine, articulating truth through rhetorical training will awaken explanations and arguments about truth from the soporific dullness with which they are often expounded. The terms that Augustine uses here are key to thinking about Milton's truth: the defense of truth must

²¹ St. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. J. F. Shaw (New York: Dover, 2009), 122.

not be “sluggish” and “frigid,” ideas that resonate with Milton’s truth in *Areopagitica*, as we shall see. At least insofar as the relationship between truth and eloquent speech are concerned, Augustine seems to be Milton’s closest ideological ancestor.

Rhetoric and the Sophistic Impulse of the Renaissance

As with these figures after whom Milton’s rhetoric takes, Milton also seems concerned with the insidious effects of sophistry on discourse. In the final lines of *Areopagitica*, there is a revealing moment in which he writes of his pro-licensing opponents’ arguments, “But of these Sophisms and Elenchs of marchandize I skill not: This I know, that errors in a good government and in a bad are equally almost incident; for what Magistrate may not be mis-inform’d, and much the sooner, if liberty of Print be reduc’t into the power of a few” (*CPW* 2.570). In his gloss on “Sophisms and Elenchs,” Ernest Sirluck writes: “Here, apparently, positive and negative logical deceit. The stationers are being accused of using sophistical arguments to establish false propositions, and elenchical arguments (in the sense of false refutations) to defend themselves against true charges or sound objections.”²² Part of Milton’s defense of truth in *Areopagitica* is insisting that truth must motivate one’s speech, lest one fall into sophistry, in which Milton claims to be unskilled. When considered in conjunction with these concluding lines, Milton’s proclamation about the love of truth being inseparable from eloquence seems to openly question and challenge sophistic speech.

In the Renaissance, the impulse toward sophistry shifted interest in rhetoric from the pursuit of wisdom and truth to a fascination with the relativity and flexibility of language. Early modern humanists seeking to hone their eloquence embraced rhetoric, and the ability to speak

²² Ernest Sirluck, from *Areopagitica*, in *The Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, vol. 2, 570n310.

persuasively was seen as necessary to nearly every facet of early modern life. This embrace was, as Brian Vickers notes, in part catalyzed by the Renaissance humanists' search for classical texts.²³ A factor contributing to the dispersion of sophistic texts was the discovery of previously lost rhetoric manuals, as Vickers and Heinrich F. Plett note; the discovery of copies of Quintilian's *Institutio Oratore*, Cicero's *De Oratore* and a number of other rhetorical manuals, along with the translation of Aristotle's rhetoric into Latin, led to the rebirth of rhetoric in Renaissance England.²⁴ As we have seen from Milton's learning, rhetoric enjoyed acclaim in early modern education, and boys brought up in the schools were exposed to a wide variety of and training in rhetoric, taking as their models the orators of the past. Jarrold E. Seigel notes that the relationship between the orator and the philosopher was one of continual fascination for Renaissance humanists; whereas rhetoric was at war with philosophy in antiquity, Renaissance orators brooked no divide between the two, certain that the love of wisdom could be attained by eloquent speech.²⁵ Trained in the rigors of the Latin grammar curriculum, young boys grew to be eloquent men well-versed in the art of persuasion; for these orators, the art of sophistry held a powerful appeal.

Whereas the sophists were once viewed antagonistically in western culture, the sophistic texts enjoyed a revival during the Renaissance with the rise of print culture, resulting in new ways of understanding eloquence. Where eloquence was, at least ideally, once taught to help students attain wisdom, it now fascinated Renaissance orators as another way to unlock the

²³ Brian Vickers, *In Defense of Rhetoric* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 255.

²⁴ Vickers, *In Defense of Rhetoric*, 220-1; Heinrich F. Plett, *Rhetoric and Renaissance Culture* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2004), 20-21.

²⁵ Jerrold E. Seigel, *Rhetoric and Philosophy in Renaissance Humanism: The Union of Eloquence and Wisdom, Petrarch to Valla* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), xi-xiii.

human potential for persuasion through ornamented speech.²⁶ Vickers argues that Renaissance rhetoricians understood their verbal arts as being a “universal power” but ignored the amorality of rhetoric because they located morality—the ability to employ rhetoric either for good or ill—within the speaker.²⁷ They ceased, observes Vickers, to distinguish rhetorical acts as good or bad unless the speaker had an obviously nefarious purpose. However, for Milton, this is a problem. Because eloquence is commensurate with the love of truth, eloquent acts performed by a speaker of questionable motive and character are no longer eloquent; instead, they are dangerous because they project the outer appearance of eloquence without being undergirded by truth. For Milton, rhetorical acts not motivated by truth and put to the wicked persuasion he would later depict, for instance, Satan using on Eve, are fundamentally flawed. What Milton seems to seek in his ways of speaking about truth is an *ethos* of truth that guides speakers as they participate in speech acts; he is prescribing an “armoury” of truth that will protect orators against falsity while allowing them equal footing with error in rhetorical combat.

My thesis will first look at Milton’s truth in *Areopagitica* as a kind of *ethos* by arguing that Milton’s excursus on truth constructs a rhetorical prescription for a speaker’s character that expands and revises the ideas of the ancient and medieval thinkers who influenced him. When I speak of the truth *ethos*, I am referring specifically to speech acts that echo the function of Milton’s truth metaphors in *Areopagitica*. By writing toward an *ethos* of truth, Milton’s work reacts against the sophistic fascination that found a new voice in Renaissance oratory. The first chapter of my thesis explores the metaphors for truth in *Areopagitica* and argues that they serve

²⁶ Eric MacPhail, *The Sophistic Renaissance* (Genève: Droz, 2011), 14; 40.

²⁷ Brian Vickers, “The Power of Persuasion: Images of the Orator, Elyot to Shakespeare,” in *Renaissance Eloquence: Studies in the Theory and Practice of Renaissance Rhetoric*, ed. James J. Murphy (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 421.

as models for orators to follow in discourse. The Miltonic truth *ethos* is one a rhetorician assumes not only as a goal of debate but also as a kind of armor to protect against and combat sophistic deception. After defining the truth *ethos* in *Areopagitica*, I will show how Milton dramatizes the consequences of rhetoric conducted in the absence of truth in Books 2 and 9 of *Paradise Lost*, arguably two of the poem's most condemnatory depictions of debate.

The second chapter moves from considering truth as *ethos* to the devils' debate in hell to look at the "servile yoke of conformity" and its relation to Milton's rhetoric. A significant component of the truth *ethos* is that it promotes and welcomes open debate; in Book 2, we are presented with a debate that is neither free nor open but instead constrained and closed. Here, Milton presents a mockery of the kind of argumentation that he privileges in *Areopagitica*; while the devils can debate, their arguments ultimately go nowhere because the debate itself is engineered by Satan. Because truth requires unrestricted discourse to thrive, the debate in Book 2 of *Paradise Lost* comments on the nature of argumentation conducted apart from truth. Satan and his devils debate at a remove from the kind of truth-seeking *ethos* that Milton describes in *Areopagitica*, and Milton presents their rhetorical shows as ultimately meaningless exercises in easy assent.

After spending some time in the lowest deep with the devils and their futile debates, the final chapter turns to Milton's most pointed criticism of the sophistic impulse in the Renaissance. In this chapter, I explore the rhetoric of the famous sophist Gorgias of Leontini and argue that he was likely a silent influence on Milton's Satan as much as the other orators whom critics often consider. Reading Book 9 as the fullest expression of Milton's criticism of truthless rhetoric, this final chapter argues that Satan is meant to evoke and critique not only the ancient sophists who

so infuriated the ancient Platonic philosophers but also the Renaissance impulse toward sophistry. Casting Satan in the role of Gorgias, known in the ancient world and the Renaissance as the father of sophistry, the third chapter argues that Milton's Book 2 reaches farther back into pre-history of *Paradise Lost* to show Satan's discursive acts as the predecessors of the ancient sophistic arts.²⁸

²⁸ Unless noted otherwise, translations of sophistic texts taken from R.K. Sprague, ed., *The Older Sophists*, trans. George S. Kennedy (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1972), 29-67.

CHAPTER 1

WITH DUST AND HEAT: TRUTH AS *ETHOS* IN *AREOPAGITICA**Introduction*

With prophetic bravura, Milton denounces licensure in *Areopagitica* for invariably causing “the stop of Truth, disexercising and blunting our abilities in what we know already,” thereby “hindering and cropping the discovery that might be yet further made in both religious and civil Wisdom” (*CPW* 2.492). This concern with the “stop of Truth” dominates the latter portion of the treatise; Milton devotes more than half of his argument to articulating his vision of truth and the problems that will occur should its proliferation be blocked. To describe truth, Milton uses metaphor; amid the many metaphors he employs, his casting of truth as armor stands out.

Milton writes that the competing and dissenting opinions of sects and schisms pose no danger to truth and instead will be “but as the dust and cinders of our feet, so long as in that notion they may serve yet to polish and brighten the armoury of Truth” (*CPW* 2.567). Milton’s description of truth as an armory being vivified by falsity deserves careful consideration because Milton’s usage here possesses an intriguing double valence. If we think back to Augustine’s description of speakers defending truth, then this armory is what helps rhetoricians defend truth—rhetoric is the armory. Another way of reading it would be to suggest that truth itself is the armory that protects rhetoricians. Modern readers might read “armoury” and imagine a collection of weapons or a container for implements of war. This reading is not incorrect: the *Oxford*

English Dictionary shows that “armoury” as “A place where arms are kept, an arsenal” was in use during the Renaissance.²⁹ Shakespeare employs it this way in *Titus Andronicus* (1594) when young Lucius threateningly delivers “The goodliest weapons of his [grandfather’s] armoury,” to the rapists Chiron and Demetrius.³⁰ Milton himself uses the word this way in *Samson Agonistes* (1671). The warrior empowered by God “With plain Heroic magnitude of mind / And celestial vigour arm’d / Thir armories and Magazines Contemns....”³¹ While this meaning was used in the Renaissance, “armoury” had another meaning, as well. The *OED* also defines armoury as “armour collectively,” and, given the context of the line in which truth becomes polished through its use, this seems to be its meaning. Milton also employs “armoury” in this way in Book 4 of *Paradise Lost*. He describes “Th’unarmed youth of Heav’n, but nigh at hand / Celestial armory, shields, helms and spears” (*PL* 4.549-50). Here, I argue that armory refers to both armor and weapons—the defensive and the offensive; it protects the rhetorician against falsity while simultaneously allowing the rhetorician to combat it. Milton’s truth not only has an armory—rhetoric—but it is an armory that protects against the dangers of rhetoric used for coercion and deceit. It is at once sword and shield, the place from where one’s oratorical attacks should be drawn but also what offers protection against falsehood and error. It is not only to be sought but, like Augustine’s truth-minded rhetorician, wielded through oratorical skill and, as Aristotle suggests, it must dwell within the speaker to protect against the corrosive effects of error.

²⁹ *The Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “armoury,” (Oxford University Press), <http://dictionary.oed.com/> (accessed March 26, 2014).

³⁰ William Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus*, *The Oxford Shakespeare*, ed. Eugene M. Waith (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 4.1.11.

³¹ John Milton, *Samson Agonistes*, in *The Complete Poems and Major Prose of John Milton*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 2003), 1279-81.

It is with this metaphor that I begin my exploration of truth in *Areopagitica* not only as an object to be sought, as an end, but as a means—as an “armor” to be worn into battle of a specific kind: rhetorical combat. Because Milton conceives of eloquence as the love of truth, Milton’s truth in *Areopagitica* may be read as having significant implications for his views toward rhetoric as a whole. As critics such as Stanley Fish and Lana Cable have noted, Milton equally emphasizes the act of *searching* for truth in addition to characterizing truth as the end result of that search. I will pick up their arguments on Milton’s truth to suggest that when Milton writes about truth in *Areopagitica*, he is constructing a kind of rhetorical *ethos* using the many and varied metaphors for truth to serve as models to follow. This *ethos* is, like his armor metaphor, a truth to be put on and worn into verbal combat.

The “Worldly” Critics vs. the “Otherworldly” Critics and Milton’s Truth

To survey the major critical perspectives on truth in *Areopagitica*, I will borrow Daniel Shore’s terminology and divide the criticism of Milton’s truth into two camps: the “worldly” and the “otherworldly” critics. In *Milton and the Art of Rhetoric*, Shore begins with a premise proposed by Stanley Fish in *How Milton Works*: that Milton’s attempts at rhetorical persuasion are really instances of what Fish terms “testimony,” meaning that every discursive act should testify to the speaker’s steadfastness against the ornamentations of language and story that could lead one astray.³² Shore proposes to bridge the divide between the two sides by “rejoining the otherworldly ascetic to the committed polemicist by folding testimony back into rhetoric.”³³ Shore identifies the worldly critics as the prevailing school, those who have argued that Milton

³² Fish, *How Milton Works*, 496.

³³ Daniel Shore, *Milton and the Art of Rhetoric*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 4.

was “an unflinching champion of civil, personal, and religious liberties; a courageous critic of monarchy; an early proponent of English Republicanism; and a key figure in the culture of dissent following the Restoration.”³⁴ On the other hand, Shore characterizes the “otherworldly” critics as upholding a Milton less concerned with pragmatism and persuasion than he is with faith and spirituality, and assuming that the practical effects of his spirituality in the public sphere will simply fall into place when these spiritual concerns are addressed.³⁵ The divide that separates these two critical camps, then, is one of practicality versus piety.

The “worldly” critics define Milton’s truth in a variety of ways, and, as Shore characterizes them, they are primarily concerned with what Milton’s truth means for active political engagement. Of the earliest “worldly” critics might be Ernest Sirluck, whose 200-page essay on the pamphlet was among the first to acknowledge that Milton’s truth might be more rhetorical than spiritual in nature. Sirluck made the compelling case that Milton’s appeals to truth and religious toleration are calculated to gain the support of the Erastians. The Erastians were, Sirluck notes, concerned with the relationship between church and state, and the more logical appeal to a wider audience than the enlarged toleration for which Milton calls would have been to call for complete separation between the two; this, however, would have enraged the Erastians. Milton needed them to change their mind on toleration, posits Sirluck, because it would divide the presbytery and steer popular opinion against licensure. Because Milton’s rhetorical appeals regarding how toleration will keep the discovery of truth alive are aimed at the Erastians, “the logical weakness of *Areopagitica*’s tolerationist argument turns out to be part of

³⁴ Ibid., 2.

³⁵ Ibid., 3.

its rhetorical strength.”³⁶ Paul M. Dowling also suggests that Milton’s truth is calculated for rhetorical effect. Dowling, in exploring the ways in which Milton misuses historical and biblical anecdotes in the treatise, suggests that Milton is playing to two different audiences: the first audience is the English Puritans, and the second audience is those members of the presbytery educated in classical philosophy.³⁷ Exploring the incongruences that arise in Milton’s pamphlet, Dowling suggests that by extending his argument to the nature of truth, Milton broadens the scope of the book, so that it takes on a “rhetorical and provisional character” intended to encourage English Protestants to embrace toleration of troubling and controversial ideas.³⁸

Thomas N. Corns takes a decidedly more negative tack to thinking about truth in *Areopagitica*. He posits that *Areopagitica* is Milton’s “most rhetorical tract, the one that owes the most to the methods of persuasion he had learned as part of his formal education, both in its shape and in the way it persistently works its audience.”³⁹ However, the pamphlet’s erudite prose, persuasive sophistication, and knowing distortions of the facts of licensure result in a text that is itself, Corns argues, “remote from truth” even when it grandly purports to be working in service of truth.⁴⁰ Wendy Olmsted also approaches Milton as primarily politically motivated. Examining

³⁶ Sirluck, “*Areopagitica*: Rhetoric and Strategy,” in *The Complete Prose Works of John Milton Vol. 2: 1643-164*, 175-6.

³⁷ It is not within the scope of this work to recount every single contradiction and logical problem that plagues Milton’s rhetoric in *Areopagitica*, especially because so many critics have already admirably done so. For a full account of Milton’s either errors or expedient (if fraught) uses of his source material, see Ernest Sirluck’s introduction and footnotes in *Areopagitica* from *The Complete Prose Works of John Milton* (Vol. 2), Stanley Fish’s *How Milton Works*, and also Paul M. Dowling’s *Polite Wisdom: Heathen Rhetoric in Milton’s Areopagitica*. In these works, the authors interpret why, beyond mere laziness or human fallibility, Milton might have intentionally or unintentionally made the mistakes that he did; this is, however, not the purpose of this study, and it has already been covered with aplomb by previous scholars, so I will not attempt it here.

³⁸ Paul M. Dowling, *Polite Wisdom: Heathen Rhetoric in Milton’s Areopagitica* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1995), 75.

³⁹ Thomas N. Corns, *John Milton: The Prose Works* (New York: Twayne, 1998), 57.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 62.

Milton's use of vehement rhetoric, Olmsted suggests that Milton's prose draws from its author's wealth of rhetorical training to "make angry speech inventive," as Milton redefines *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* in his polemical prose to confront "radical social, political, and religious differences."⁴¹ Olmsted writes that Milton's "true orator" has a "heroic ethos, ready to test truth in open battle," and his arguments are imbued with "emotional and moral conviction."⁴² Elizabeth Sauer argues that Milton's defense of truth in *Areopagitica* is a defense of all interpretive acts, rendered impossible by the prelates and authorities attempting to enforce licensure.⁴³

Shore also counts himself among the worldly critics, and he sets out to reunite Milton's pragmatic and spiritual critics. He explains Milton's truth as contingent upon "a community and the process it makes possible."⁴⁴ Shore argues that Milton's truth is one of many "persuasive fictions" Milton employs, but truth "retains its power" despite being, by the end of Milton's career, no longer "absolute, inviolable, or all-sufficient," as Milton would have us believe.⁴⁵ However, Shore also counters Fish's notion that Milton's "true eloquence" is an anti-aesthetic, or, as Shore rightly supposes Fish might mean, an anti-rhetoric, suggesting that Milton's truth is instead a "super-aesthetic" that as Milton might see it "deserves credence merely by being itself, rendering all other authorities specious or superfluous."⁴⁶ The truth Milton elaborates in

⁴¹ Wendy Olmsted, *Rhetoric: An Historical Introduction* (Malden: Blackwell, 2006), 84.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Elizabeth Sauer, *Barbarous Dissonance and Images of Voice in Milton's Epic* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), 48.

⁴⁴ Shore, 78-80.

⁴⁵ Shore, 4.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 77.

Areopagitica, Shore argues, is “a different kind of truth—we would now associate it with liberalism—that is at once more moderate and more revolutionary.”⁴⁷ The worldly critics all understand Milton as having both feet firmly planted on earth, his concerns pragmatic even when in his treatise he grandiloquently defends truth in service of God.

Pitching their tents on the other side of the divide, the “otherworldly” critics, who contend that Milton is more concerned with matters of faith than political engagement, tend to be led by Stanley Fish. Fish argues that Milton’s purpose in *Areopagitica* is to pen a text that emblemizes the impossibility of trying to contain truth within an exterior object, like a book. To make his case, Fish suggests that the text continually defaults on its promise of showing how to discern truth from falsity by encouraging the reader to “a premature act of understanding or concluding, which is then undone or upset by the introduction of a new and complicating perspective,” thereby forcing the reader into a constant reevaluation of the argument Milton is making.⁴⁸ Forcing this constant reevaluation constitutes for the reader a kind of “labor and exercise,” which Fish argues is necessary for the reader to establish his or her own virtue.⁴⁹ Fish argues that Milton’s project is to make “us into members of her [Truth’s] incorporate body so that we can finally be,” like the Christ of *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*, “living oracles.”⁵⁰ These living oracles are filled with and in service of truth. Fish concludes, however, that this is a futile endeavor for human beings because we are, as he writes, marred “by the impurity of

⁴⁷ Ibid., 79.

⁴⁸ Fish, *How Milton Works*, 204.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 205.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 212.

difference, of not being one with God.”⁵¹ Lacking the divine essence, Fish concludes, humanity is always striving for truth but will never fully be able to access it.

While Fish might be viewed as Milton’s primary otherworldly archbishop, a number of other critics are either in step with or disciples of Fish’s work. Baumlin ascribes to Milton a “prophetic *ethos*” in which Milton is trying to create “right readers” guided by the Holy Spirit and thus becoming inured to human persuasion.⁵² This prophetic *ethos* manifests itself in *Areopagitica* when Milton “argues famously in defense of the individual’s right to test and affirm a truth—that is, to attend to one’s private ‘inward persuasion’ free from the compulsions of external arguments and authorities.”⁵³ Lana Cable is also an important figure among these “otherworldly” critics. “*Areopagitica* ... regularly points to the inadequacy of all signs to express the truths they serve,” writes Cable, positing that Milton expresses an iconoclastic impulse in his work. Cable characterizes Milton’s truth as possessing what she terms an affective indeterminacy, as truth, even when it is discovered, leads the truth-seeker to continue searching. “Truth,” Cable argues, “is neither to be lamented as lost nor regretted as yet unfound. For, in *Areopagitica*, the only substantial ‘meaning’ of truth lies in the activity required by the search itself.”⁵⁴ Truth itself then is always out of reach, and wherever it may be located is not the point for Milton. Instead, suggests Cable, the purpose of Milton’s truth in *Areopagitica* is the exercise of “reason toward a lively comprehension.”⁵⁵

⁵¹ Ibid., 213.

⁵² Baumlin, *Theologies of Language*, xiii.

⁵³ Ibid., 188.

⁵⁴ Cable, 118-119.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 119.

This work by Fish and Cable, then, suggests that Milton's truth is more about the act of seeking rather than the end of finding, and it is a position that I would like to continue to explore and expand while, like Shore, drawing out its pragmatic political implications. Because Milton describes truth as shifting in form, I argue, he is fashioning a rhetorical *ethos* that the rhetorician assumes not only to promote truth but to put it on—to assume it as an armor against error and practice “right rhetoric.” Because truth can never be found but we must always be searching, this *ethos* is, for Milton, an ideal for which to strive. His expansive defense of truth in *Areopagitica* serves not only as a digressive excursus on the nature of truth as proof against licensure but also as instruction for the type of disposition the truth-seeking rhetorician or orator must possess. Describing truth as a streaming fountain that must continually flow or else become muddied, for instance, or truth as a warrior ready to be tested in combat are ways that Milton draws out the divided fragments of truth and then tries to cast them in terms that his fallen, at least in the Christian sense, readers can understand.

In this chapter, I argue that Milton's metaphors for truth in *Areopagitica* help articulate truth as a kind of *ethos* or character. If, as Milton suggests in *An Apology*, true eloquence is the serious and hearty love of truth, then the truth-seeker that Milton describes in *Areopagitica* is also a kind of Miltonic orator. Truth for Milton can only be discerned through discursive acts with others, but it can only be found by those also genuinely motivated to search for it. To show what truth looks like in the world, Milton employs a number of different metaphors, and these metaphors all contain different aspects of his truth. These aspects, I suggest, serve as models and guides. To assume an *ethos* of truth, Milton suggests through *Areopagitica* suggests that one must assume truth like an “armoury” by becoming like truth.

Before assessing Milton's *ethos* of truth in *Areopagitica*, it will be useful to revisit the quote from *An Apology against a Pamphlet*. In *An Apology*, Milton provides what many critics have taken as his clearest statement on rhetoric: "Yet true eloquence I find to be none," he writes, "but the serious and hearty love of truth" (CPW 1.949). Noting the significance of the "Yet," which juxtaposes it against Milton's careful admission that he is not "utterly untrain'd in those rules which best Rhetoricians have giv'n, or unacquainted with those examples which the prime authors of eloquence have written," Fish characterizes this moment as Milton's anti-aesthetic against eloquence, as Milton suggests that eloquence and the love of truth are inextricable from one another; eloquence that attempts persuasion but is not in the service of truth is not eloquence at all.⁵⁶ And yet if Milton is operating in the Augustinian mode of rhetoric, as is suggested by the close relationship between his and Augustine's explanations of truth and eloquence's relationship, then this is not a moment in which Milton condemns rhetoric, per se, but a moment in which he asserts the primacy of truth in the quest for eloquence.

The Miltonic Truth Ethos

When I attempt to construct an *ethos* of truth from Milton's *Areopagitica*, I mean to say it is an attitude toward rhetoric that originates with a love of truth. In less abstract terms, it means that the orator takes the characteristics of Milton's truth as a model to follow in oratory. Perhaps the clearest thesis statement that Milton provides for what the truth-seeking rhetorician must possess as an *ethos* occurs early in *Areopagitica*:

He that can apprehend and consider vice with all her baits and seeming pleasures,
and yet abstain, and yet distinguish, and yet prefer that which is truly better, he is

⁵⁶ Fish, *How Milton Works*, 118.

the true warfaring Christian. I cannot praise a fugitive and cloister'd virtue,
 unexercis'd & unbreath'd, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks
 out of the race, where that immortall garland is to be run for, not without dust and
 heat. Assuredly we bring not innocence into the world, we bring impurity much
 rather: that which purifies us is triall, and triall is by what is contrary. That virtue
 therefore which is but a youngling in the contemplation of evill, and knows not
 the utmost that vice promises to her followers, and rejects it, is but a blank virtue,
 not a pure.... (CPW 2.515-16)

This passage contains kernels of the Miltonic truth *ethos* that Milton expounds throughout the text and reiterates through his metaphors. Several key points in this paragraph merit closer inspection. First, the Miltonic truth *ethos* knows the enemy, and it does not shrink away from evil but “sallies out” to meet “her adversary.” It does not, however, fall prey to vice. Rather than hiding away in a cloister, it tests its virtue against evil, and if it does not test its virtue, or if it does not know evil but then proves its virtue superior without understanding why or how it succeeded, then its virtue proves to be only “blank,” empty, and will not have been purified and burnished, thereby becoming stronger. Second, following from the first supposition, the Miltonic truth *ethos* is, in this metaphor, cast as unafraid of healthy competition and debate, for this is from what Milton’s truth *ethos* draws its strength; for the rhetorician, this would be a willingness to participate in and engage in discourse with the aim of seeking truth. Third, Milton’s truth *ethos* requires labor and exercise; it does not retreat or “slink out of the race” but instead runs the race “with dust and heat.” While the way Milton casts truth could be taken as rhetorical moves to enliven his descriptions and avoid boring his audience, as Augustine would have suggested, there

is enough symbolic resemblance between each metaphor that they seem to bear scrutiny in terms of one another. The text reiterates similar ideas about truth in a variety of ways to model the *ethos* the Miltonic rhetorician must possess. Even if fully characterizing Milton's truth is impossible—indeed, the nature of truth, as Milton argues, is to be always changing shape—we can still glean a few of the important qualities that the truth-seeker must love to acquire eloquence in Milton's terms.

Of Knowing Good by Evil

To know one's enemy is the key to victory not only in war but in discourse, and for Milton's *ethos* of truth, the knowledge of good and evil informs the Miltonic rhetorician who is able to weigh these choices. Milton writes, "Good and evill we know in the field of this World grow up together almost inseparably; and the knowledge of good is so involv'd and interwoven with the knowledge of evill" (*CPW* 2.514). The razor-thin margin between good and evil, however, does not drive Milton's heroic orator away; instead, the orator, imbued with the hearty and serious love of truth that Milton characterizes as true eloquence, meets evil head on and uses it to discern good from evil. Indeed, Fish notes, it is incredibly difficult to do this in a fallen world, so one must "SEEK" [emphasis Fish's] to understand truth amid the myriad false messages attempting to disrupt the orator's quest for truth.⁵⁷ The Miltonic orator "apprehends" and "considers" vice's "baits and seeming pleasures" without succumbing to them. It is crucial for Milton that "evil," which he characterizes in the tract in a number of ways ranging from lust to heresy, be allowed to proliferate because this is how we recognize good. Evil throws goodness into relief, and so the Miltonic orator possesses an understanding of evil so as not to fall prey to

⁵⁷ Stanley Fish, *Versions of Anti-humanism: Milton and Others* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 62.

the problem that plagues Adam in *Paradise Lost*. It is a risk, writes Milton, to fall into “that doom which Adam fell into of knowing good and evil, that is to say of knowing good by evil,” and yet this knowledge of evil precedes the apprehension and consideration of vice’s pitfalls (*CPW* 2.514).

Books themselves serve as Milton’s primary metaphor for the relationship between good and evil in *Areopagitica*. To strengthen one’s virtue in the service of truth, the righteous Miltonic *ethos* does not call for the removal and abolition of sin, embodied in *Areopagitica* in the form of books for Milton’s purpose, for to “banish all objects of lust” and “shut up all youth into the severest discipline that can be exercised in any hermitage” serves merely to hide evil without ever confronting it (*CPW* 2.527). Rather than be fully rid of these temptations, we need them in order to understand good and to tell it from evil.

Milton’s metallurgic metaphors make this relationship between good and evil most clearly. Milton further approaches the need for evil to throw good into relief by suggesting that an understanding of evil’s workings is *necessary* for discriminating vice from virtue. When describing how books containing evil can be made to serve truth, Milton employs a metallurgic metaphor to suggest that one who is able to resist the temptation of vice will be able to play the good refiner and “gather gold out of the drossiest volume” (*CPW* 2. 521). Championing the freedom even of libelous, seditious, or heretical books, Milton further expounds the range of his argument by suggesting that the bad books that licensure seeks to suppress are no threat to one with a mature understanding of evil who can thereby resist its snares. Indeed, because good and evil are so often difficult to tell apart and “the matter of them both is the same,” Milton argues that when sin is expelled, so too is virtue (*CPW* 2.520). We might take this to mean that the

ability to *test* one's virtue is removed if there is no possibility of sin, rendering it the blank virtue that Milton says tests itself without knowledge of evil. By removing sin, we remove the potential for truth—whatever shape it may take—to emerge. The model the orator is to take from this metaphor is that to be able to withstand temptation is a sign of one's inner orientation toward truth.

A Free and Open Encounter

In addition to distinguishing good from evil, Milton's *ethos* of truth instills in the rhetorician a love of healthy debate—that is, debate that is open to all “good” men and performed while motivated by a genuine search for truth. Milton summarizes this desire when he pleads, “Give me the liberty to know, to utter, and to argue freely according to conscience, above all liberties” (*CPW* 2.560). Here Milton's call is more complicated than requesting a blanket ability to say whatever he wants; rather, the abilities “to know, to utter, and to argue freely” are critical to searching for truth, and therefore critical to the emulation of truth as a quality of one's character. Where the seemingly sensible solution is to find a way to a peace easily won, Milton's truth *ethos* creates an open space in which opinions can be heard and given consideration based on their merits.

One of the prevailing metaphors that Milton employs for truth engaging in and emerging from debate is that it is a warrior locked in combat, and this is the clearest model that Milton provides for the rhetorician to emulate. Milton's use of martial rhetoric equates discourse with combat and, by personifying truth as a combatant on the field of battle, provides the ideal orator with an emblem to follow. Milton's truth participates in “the wars of Truth,” and Milton takes as a given that “Truth is strong next to the Almighty,” confident that she will always emerge

victorious against falsity and error (*CPW* 2.562-63). She is unafraid either of evil or open debate, and she must be prepared to test her virtue rather than shrink away from a challenge. Milton writes: “And though all the windes of doctrine were let loose to play upon the earth, so Truth be in the field, we do injuriously by licencing and prohibiting to misdoubt her strength. Let her and Falsehood grapple; who ever knew Truth put to the wors, in a free and open encounter. Her confuting is the best and surest suppressing” (*CPW* 2.561). This combat suggests that if multiple and conflicting doctrines and opinions are allowed their say, then truth will still triumph no matter what those opinions are. Truth being put to the test against error, Milton argues, will prove the far better suppresser than any order of licensure. It is this model—the warrior marching forward to battle—that Milton would have the Miltonic orator internalize as part of an *ethos* based on truth. This grappling that occurs takes its form in the world as a continual striving and debate that requires there to be dissenting opinions and views.

However, this is far from a popular opinion, and many in the predominantly Christian world for which Milton is writing view this kind of open debate as a problem. The prevailing metaphor during these scenes is that of a building—the Temple of God—being constructed. “There be who perpetually complain of schisms and sects,” writes Milton, “and make it such a calamity that any man dissents from their maxims. ’Tis their own pride and ignorance which causes the disturbing, who neither will hear with meekness, nor can convince” (*CPW* 2.550). The perpetual complaint of sects and schisms against which Milton protests would see open debate closed in favor of conformity. This is, however, a problem because argumentation, debate, and discourse are the ways a person seeks truth. Milton writes that “Where there is much desire to learn, there of necessity will be much arguing, much writing, many opinions; for opinion in

good men is but knowledge in the making. Under these fantastic terrors of sects and schism, we wrong the earnest and zealous thirst after knowledge and understanding which God hath stirred up in this city” (*CPW* 2.554). The fear of sects and schisms, of those disunities that open the space for disagreement and debate, is for Milton a bogeyman with the power to stop those who would search for truth through argumentation.

The fear of sects and schisms is one of the more immediate problems of seventeenth-century England that Milton confronts in *Areopagitica*. The division of the Christian church into disparate denominations and groups created an anxiety that Milton is warring against because the fear of conflict threatens free discourse. For Milton, this division signals not disharmony but the natural working out of truth as each person finds and contributes a piece of its scattered body. Milton describes those decrying division in the church as stopping the forward progress of truth. He asserts that intellectual and theological debate, because of our limited, post-lapsarian knowledge, are necessary for advancement in our fallen state, and to act otherwise is to behave “as if, while the temple of the Lord was building, some cutting, some squaring the marble, others hewing the cedars, there should be a sort of irrational men who could not consider there must be many schisms and many dissections made in the quarry and in the timber, ere the house of God can be built” (*CPW* 2.555). The metaphor here is that because a building is not a single, smooth, continuous whole, ruptures, cracks, contours, and fissures are all unavoidable when fitting these disparate pieces together. Despite them, the building is still a whole. What is also interesting in this moment is that the “temple of the Lord,” ostensibly what Puritan Milton views as the place where truth—if it can ever be contained—resides, is that each person has a role to play in assembling the building:

And when every stone is laid artfully together, it cannot be united into a continuity, it can but be contiguous in this world; neither can every piece of the building be of one form; nay rather the perfection consists in this, that, out of many moderate varieties and brotherly dissimilitudes that are not vastly disproportional, arises the goodly and the graceful symmetry that commends the whole pile and structure. (*CPW* 2.555)

Milton's distinction between continuity and contiguity here is key to understanding "graceful symmetry." The truth that humans reassemble through discourse can never be completely unified but adjoining pieces can be put near enough together to coexist in harmony even in their dissimilitude and difference. For Milton, the dissimilitude of the various pieces is not the problem—it isn't even the point. What matters instead is that all of the builders of truth have the same goal in mind, even if the pieces they contribute are not the same. The orator is to imitate those builders who are unafraid to contribute their pieces and are motivated to reassemble truth even if the truth they find cannot be artfully laid together into one unified whole.

If truth cannot be reunited into a continuous form and the quest to unite its pieces is more important than the end product, then servile unity is an enemy to truth rather than its final goal. Another metaphor that Milton uses to describe truth's flow is a fountain flowing. He writes that "if her waters flow not in a perpetuall progression, they sick'n into a muddy pool of conformity and tradition" (*CPW* 2.543). Sects and schisms that seek unity to stop discourse slow truth's flow and muddy it in painless agreement. The problematic opposite of debate, which these sects and schisms create, is not unity precisely but instead "the iron yoke of outward conformity," which pretends toward continuity without acknowledging contiguity. Milton sarcastically laments this

outward conformity: “How goodly, and how to be wisht were such an obedient unanimity as this, what a fine conformity would it starch us all into? doubtles a stanch and solid peece of framework, as any January could freeze together” (*CPW* 2.545). This image of an “obedient unanimity” frozen together by the January cold and merged into an unnatural continuity arises from the “dull ease of and cessation of our knowledge” (*CPW* 2.545). These sects and schisms result in a servile, lazy people who feign outward conformity and then slow the quest for truth. Milton’s use of cold imagery suggests an opposition to the vital and active search that living an *ethos* of truth requires. Seeking a kind of cold conformity rather than the flowing fountain, they freeze into dormancy.

What Milton proposes as the solution to this quashing of dissenting opinions, then, is a unity through disunity; disunity, however, does not necessarily equate to disharmony. Harmony and peace are not antithetical to Milton’s vision for free and open discourse. He argues that what is needed in this debate is “unity of Spirit” rather than the unity of opinions and ideas (*CPW* 2.565). In achieving unity of spirit—that is, to acknowledge that truth may take different forms and open debate and discourse are necessary to allow truth to thrive—Milton suggests that we may find the “bond of peace,” that is, learning to remain harmonious while simultaneously embracing disagreement and dissent. This bond of peace is different from the outward conformity Milton so disdains because the outward conformity stops the progression of truth; the bond of peace allows the Miltonic orator to acknowledge and consider dissenting opinions that others contribute. What this means for the Miltonic *ethos* is that the orator who takes on the character of Milton’s truth-seeker acknowledges contiguity but promotes this healthy debate knowing that out of it, the truth will eventually emerge.

With Dust and Heat

In assuming the proliferation of truth as an *ethos*, the Miltonic orator, then, not only understand open debate intellectually and abstractly but also participates in it actively and vigorously. As Milton writes, truth will be justified in free and open encounter, but the spirit in which the seeker searches for this truth is equally important. In the key passage mentioned above, one reason why he cannot praise “a fugitive and cloistered virtue” is because it is inactive, cold, and sluggish. If we take Milton’s truth as a model for the Miltonic orator to emulate, then the model itself is active, vigorous, and exercised. It is, as a kind of “armory,” offensive as well as defensive. It is practiced and cultivated by engaging with others.

Milton frequently conceives of truth not merely as an object but as a process, casting the search for truth in terms of exercise and labor. Indeed, the search for truth is one that is active, unceasing, and strenuous. While exposing the perils of book licensure, Milton writes that every mature truth-seeker must be allowed the right to “exercise his own leading capacity” (*CPW* 2.513). “Faith and knowledge,” Milton writes, “thrive by exercise” (*CPW* 2.543). In addition to exercise, being oriented toward the finding and discerning of truth is often characterized as hard work and labor in *Areopagitica*. Milton calls the identification and rooting out of corruption and falsity “a fond labour” while those who would search for truth are “labouring the hardest labour in the deep mines of knowledge” (*CPW* 2.523; 2.562). And this exercise and hard labor are not single occurrences; rather, they are habits of mind refined over time through repetition. Milton casts his ideal truth-seekers in active terms, “disputing, reasoning, reading, inventing, discoursing, even to a rarity and admiration, things not before discoursed or written of” (*CPW*

2.557). The present participle ending on these gerunds are indicative of the lesson he wants his readers to internalize: the search for truth requires continuous, ceaseless activity and searching.

These metaphors of labor and exercise not only reinforce the notion that Milton's truth is more about the action than the object but also suggest that Milton's truth is not easily approached. This labor is important for the individual truth-seeker because it suggests that the work ethic the Miltonic orator must possess is one of tireless and continual effort. As we have seen, Milton's truth is not easily delimited and is always out of reach, so to quest for truth requires a hale and hearty disposition, unfazed by the perpetuity of the search. If truth were discerned with ease, if the truth-seeker's end goal could be achieved without labor and exercise, it would be for Milton but a shade of truth because truth requires strenuous effort. Without the drive to discern truth, one becomes liable to simply follow the opinion and doctrine of another. Milton writes that "A man may be a heretick in the truth; and if he beleeeve things only because his Pastor sayes so, or the Assembly so determines, without knowing other reason, though his belief be true, yet the very truth he holds, becomes his heresie" (*CPW* 2.543). This suggests not only that an *ethos* of truth requires a healthy skepticism toward claims that are presented as true but also that to tacitly accept them would then be to risk making oneself a heretic in the truth that one desires to emulate.

The consequence for an orator who puts aside the exercising and breathing of truth is that the speaker becomes cold and inactive. The result of the inactivity that Milton condemns is "the forc't and outward union of cold and neutral and inwardly divided minds" (*CPW* 2.551). "Cold" and "neutral" are key words in this line. As we have seen, Milton fears conformity because it will result in "a staunch and solid piece of framework, as any January could freeze together" (*CPW*

2.545). To conform is, for Milton, to forfeit searching for truth by settling for ease and comfort. There is no dust or heat to be found in conformity. Milton's criticism of these minds as "neutral" reinforces the problems he perceives with coldness because neutrality suggests that to be cold, one must forfeit one's stake in the debate and give up the vigorous search that truth requires. To "enter the glorious waies of Truth and prosperous vertue," one must be hot, active, and running the race with dust and heat. Milton's comparison to the body suggests that the search for truth can only be conducted by one who is alive not only physically but intellectually. He writes that just as the body is living, so too must the truth-seeker, possessing "fresh" blood and a spirit that is "pure and vigorous" (*CPW* 2.557). Finally, Milton condemns those who are cold and neutral as being inwardly divided. As we have seen, for Milton, division among truth-seekers is not necessarily a problem, but to be divided inwardly means that one has not focused on seeking and finding truth. The search for truth requires one who is willing to exercise, labor, and strive for truth. The inward disposition of the truth-seeking orator must be a work ethic that is unafraid to participate in active labor. One last way the orator does this is by searching, which I will discuss in its own section because it is especially important.

To Be Still Searching

Part of the "labour and exercise" of truth is the tireless act of searching for it, and several of Milton's references to searching are important to consider in the essay. One of the most important aspects of Milton's truth is that it must be sought; that is, the act of searching for truth is solely important because the finding of truth itself is impossible. For Milton the good English Protestant, the form of truth was at one time unified in the body of the son of God descending to earth, a metaphor that becomes intermingled with, as Dowling has pointed out, Milton's

misreading of the Osiris myth.⁵⁸ Soaring to one of the pamphlet's greatest prophetic heights, Milton declares:

Truth indeed came once into the world with her divine Master, and was a perfect shape most glorious to look on: but when he ascended, and his Apostles after him were laid to sleep, then straight arose a wicked race of deceivers, who, as that story goes of the Egyptian Typhon with his conspirators, how they dealt with the good Osiris, took the virgin Truth, hewed her lovely form into a thousand pieces, and scattered them to the four winds. (*CPW* 2.549)

In this way, truth, with its severed limbs, is indeed an object to be sought, but the key here is not the limbs that must be found but that it requires a search. "From that time on" writes Milton, "the sad friends of Truth, such as durst appear, imitating the careful search that Isis made for the mangled body of Osiris, went up and down gathering up limb by limb, still as they could find them" (*CPW* 2.549). In this case, the metaphor for searching for truth contains within it an explicit reference not only to searching but to imitation—this search is not only what the truth-seeker but the Miltonic orator must imitate. The reason she needs to be gathered and sought is because truth's form, according to Milton, has been dismembered and severed, separated from herself. Milton follows this description of truth as the dismembered Osiris with the following admonition:

Give her but room, and do not bind her when she sleeps, for then she speaks not true, as the old Proteus did, who spake oracles only when he was caught and bound, but then rather she turns herself into all shapes, except her own, and

⁵⁸ Dowling, 75.

perhaps tunes her voice according to the time, as Micaiah did before Ahab, until she be adjured into her own likeness. Yet it is not impossible that she may have more shapes than one. What else is all that rank of things indifferent, wherein Truth may be on this side or on the other, without being unlike herself? (*CPW* 2.563)

For truth not to be unlike herself and to be on multiple sides at once further suggests that truth for Milton is not necessarily an object being pursued; it is a kind of inward motivation rather than the external object alone. This particular argument has the greatest import for Milton's truth as a kind of rhetorical *ethos*. Milton writes that truth, no matter what shape it takes, emerges victorious even in the face of the kind of error that Milton perceives will be allowed to proliferate should licensure prevail. Because truth can assume many shapes, no one speaker may possess her.

Despite truth being protean and shifting, Milton's truth exemplifies the characteristics of what Milton believes the orator should love about truth, and these metaphors necessarily affect Milton's view of rhetoric. *Areopagitica*, then, becomes something like a handbook for seeking the truth rather than an object or end that itself possesses truth. "True eloquence" for Milton requires an orator disposed to search and exercise who is concerned with truth not only as an end but as a habit to cultivate—a function of character.

Conclusion

To return to the metaphor for truth as an armory at the beginning of the chapter, when Milton writes about truth in *Areopagitica*, his descriptions of it offer various forms of protection and offensive power for the orator who assumes Milton's truth as an *ethos* in rhetorical combat.

The orator must understand evil to be protected against its influence, but the orator must also be ready to engage with that evil and defeat it, empowered by truth. The implications of Milton's metaphors for truth and how to discern it are critical to his views of rhetoric; from Milton's suggestion that the love of truth is true eloquence, we can suppose that when Milton is talking about truth, he is also talking about eloquence. The certainty with which Milton attacks licensure while promoting division and disunity as boons to the search for truth is never in question, and Milton's confidence renders the whole text as an emblem of the sort of faith in the truth the Miltonic orator needs to acquire true eloquence. By lauding uncertainty—the privileging of opinion and dissent—with such certainty, Milton strikes an important pose that provides *Areopagitica* as a model for the kind of *ethos* the truth-seeker needs to adopt. True eloquence is the hearty love of truth, Milton writes in *An Apology*, so in *Areopagitica*, adopting the traits of his many images and metaphors of truth—of these models he provides for emulation—means that in order to find truth, one must try to *become* truth, or at least become like truth.

What Milton sets up, then, is an ideal *ethos* and standard by which rhetorical discourse and rhetoricians themselves can be judged. If they do not meet the qualifications of this schema—that is, if the rhetorician lacks an understanding of evil in order to understand good, does not promote healthy debate, or fails to search for truth actively and unceasingly—then they will fall far short of “true eloquence.” In the following chapters, we will see two examples of how these debates conducted in the absence of truth occur in *Paradise Lost*, in which Milton works out the consequences and perils of a rhetoric that is unguided by truth. In the devils' debate, we will see Milton construct a mockery of the kind of free and open discourse that he here privileges, while

in the temptation scene in the Garden, truth is utterly circumvented by the sophistic displays of Satan.

CHAPTER 2

“FIRM FAITH, AND FIRM ACCORD / MORE THAN CAN BE IN HEAV’N”:

CONFORMITY AND THE DEMONIC *ETHOS**Introduction*

If one of Milton’s projects in *Areopagitica* is to construct an *ethos* for seeking truth via discourse, then Milton’s truth *ethos* has significant consequences for orators motivated by aims other than truth. The devils’ council in Book 2 of *Paradise Lost* dramatizes the outcome of a debate conducted by orators not inhabiting Milton’s truth. By emptying his debate scenes of the potential to discern truth of any sort, Milton depicts speech lacking this *ethos* as ringing hollow and producing no effect other than meaningless clamor. The *ethos* of the devils is not motivated by the tireless search for truth and carried out by rhetorical battle with one another; rather, they seek an easy solution that results in acquiescence with as little struggle as possible. In this chapter, I will assert that the debate in hell is part of Milton’s way of critiquing the Renaissance orator’s fondness for sophistry in the form of showy speeches of little substance. The debate has a pre-determined outcome resulting in easy assent, thereby parodying the kind of debate and argumentation Milton lauds in *Areopagitica*.

Critics assessing this scene rarely consider Milton’s truth and its relation to *ethos* and how these might influence (or not influence, rather) the terms of the demons’ debate. While it seems paradoxical, even absurd, to talk about debate among demons in terms of truth, it is significant that Milton, who considers debate as a key component of understanding truth, would

frame the devils' scene as a debate. This is one of the many extra-biblical scenes in *Paradise Lost* in which Milton dramatizes his own interests. Shore demonstrates that in the scenes in which devils attempt their greatest feats of persuasion, Milton critiques the rhetorical tradition of *actio*, the physical delivery of persuasion, suggesting that the dazzling of the audience with controlled bodily gestures rather than the content is key to the success of their rhetorical acts.⁵⁹ William Pallister's *Between Worlds* devotes an entire chapter to the rhetoric of hell in *Paradise Lost*. Analyzing the function and execution of rhetoric in Milton's hell, Pallister argues that hellish oratory is fueled by self-deception. Deprived of free will, the devils' attempts at persuasive acts, he argues, cannot work because they now lack the divinely-granted ability to make autonomous choices, despite being self-deceived into thinking they are engaging in acts of decision and discernment.⁶⁰ With their free will removed, they remain unaware that their choices are but the illusion of choice. Ryan J. Stark offers an equally compelling appraisal, arguing that the demonic rhetoric of Milton's Satan relies most often on antithesis and irony (this is interesting to note in terms of the sophist Gorgias, whom we'll meet in the next chapter).⁶¹ Though seemingly ignited with fire and fervor, Satan's—and all demons'—grand oratorical displays are chilly, Stark argues, resulting in “a deadening type of eloquence, unable to produce warmth, and instead designed to evacuate life itself from the audience.”⁶² The thread unifying

⁵⁹ Shore, 109.

⁶⁰ Pallister, *Between Worlds: The Rhetorical Universe of Paradise Lost* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 188.

⁶¹ Ryan J. Stark, *Rhetoric, Science, and Magic in Seventeenth-Century England* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2009), 121.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 121.

each of these critics' arguments is that, whether it is empty, self-deceived, or cold, argument in hell is ultimately hollow.

In this chapter, I will extend this conversation about the vacuity of demonic rhetoric by exploring how the debate lacks truth as its *ethos* and how this lack manifests in a pre-determined debate that privileges conformity and ease. Unmotivated by truth, their demonic council parodies the kind of free and open argumentation that Milton extols in *Areopagitica*. Their words not fueled by the serious and hearty love of truth, and because they lack Milton's "true eloquence," their grandiose rhetorical displays become mere performance that can never effect change. Because the devils speak without searching for truth, their seemingly-eloquent speeches become only displays of empty oratorical prowess.

A Well-Ended, Long Debate?

In the calls to action and response, the devils' "debate"—the word Satan uses to describe their process—becomes a farce of the kind of debate that Milton writes about in *Areopagitica*. Where ideal discourse in *Areopagitica* seeks truth, is unafraid of being tested, and searches actively, the debate in hell's outcome is determined from the start by Satan. While there is something to be said for finding a solution in the real world, Milton dramatizes these issues for poetic effect—his demonstrations of what happens to truth in these kinds of debates are dramatic and heightened to create a lasting impression, but they are no less ruminating on the consequences of debate and argument performed in the absence of truth.

The long discussion takes on the character and appearance of debate, but it can hardly be called such because of its predetermined outcome. Pallister theorizes that the devils are constrained by their lack of free will and therefore cannot debate in any substantive way, instead

posing debates and arguments while deluded that they have choice.⁶³ I would like to push this further: the devils not only lack free will, but their wills and arguments are constrained by Satan, who decides the outcome before the beginning—that is, no matter how eloquent they are, the devils’ debate is always headed toward the same end. The Argument of Book 2 makes this clear when setting forth the debate’s terms in a curious moment: “Some advise it, others dissuade. A third proposal is preferred, *mentioned before by Satan*, to search the truth of that prophecy or tradition in Heaven concerning another world and another creature equal or not much inferior to themselves, about this time created” (*PL 2.Argument*, italics mine). Here, the Argument refers to Satan’s final speech in Book 1, in which he tells his minions of God’s plan:

Space may produce new Worlds; whereof so rife
 There went a fame in Heav’n that he ere long
 Intended to create, and therein plant
 A generation, whom his choice regard
 Should favour equal to the Sons of Heav’n:
 Thither, if but to pry; shall be perhaps
 Our first eruption, thither or elsewhere.... (*PL 1.650-56*)

In referring back to this moment from the first book, the argument offers a clue that Satan has engineered this debate and its outcome from the beginning. From Book 1, Satan has a preferred outcome in mind for the debate, and in intimating that their “first eruption” will be “thither or elsewhere,” he points to his favored course of action. “Thither” in this instance points to the new world that will be created, and the repetition of “thither” further clues the reader in that Satan has

⁶³ Pallister, 178.

already determined the direction of events. By employing the word twice within just a few lines, Satan strongly insinuates that his desired plan is to sneak into Eden and take it by seduction rather than force. This is further confirmed by the narrator following Beelzebub's speech. While Beelzebub sues for peace with heaven for the time being, the twist in his plan, to spite God by corrupting his newer and higher-esteemed creation, is not, the Miltonic narrator tells us, his own idea but is instead "first devised / By Satan and in part proposed" (*PL* 2.379-80). Furthermore, Milton's demons are not characterized as possessing any notable ingenuity. Beelzebub, the narrator tells us, did not come up with this plan on his own. In fact, none of the devils aside from Satan could have come up with this idea:

... For whence
 But from the author of all ill could spring
 So deep a malice to confound the race
 Of mankind in one root and Earth with Hell
 To mingle and involve, done all to spite
 The great Creator? (*PL* 2.380-85)

Having heard that Satan preferred this course of action, Beelzebub seizes upon it. What these lines suggest, then, is that the debate itself has been little more than a show. No actual debate has taken place here; instead, Satan had a plan in mind, and the devils were eager to go along. Unlike debate in *Areopagitica*, which privileges a free and open encounter between clashing opinions, the devils partake in a debate where there are no actual choices to be made. Milton's idea of debate in *Areopagitica* is one in which opinions are heard, weighed, and considered, but here, because Satan has already decided which direction the argument will go, the arguments made by

the devil are little more than performances in oratory meant to bring the devils to assent.

Furthermore, it bears mentioning that if free debate is necessary for determining truth, as Milton argues in *Areopagitica*, then by guiding the debate in a certain direction, Satan's *ethos* seeks not debate but expedient conformity. Because it lacks an open end, the argument is not really an argument.

Easy and Slothful Solutions

The arguments that the devils make are intended to get them to this conformity by means of offering easier and easier solutions as we advance through the ranks. During the council, through the use of eloquent arguments, Moloch, Belial, Mammon, and Beelzebub each attempt to persuade Satan and the other devils to their proposed courses of action. Rather than debating each other, precisely, they present variations on the same theme. Because the terms of the debate have been set, none of the arguments are persuading so much as gradually building toward Satan's preferred course. Moloch's initial call for war gives way to a snowball of arguments that are modified and reconstituted until the other devils assent. Moloch opens, suing for another battle against heaven: "No! Let us rather choose / Armed with hell flames and fury all at once / O'er Heav'n's high tow'rs to force resistless way" (*PL* 2.60-62). Moloch's argument, however, is least convincing. The devils, the Miltonic narrator notes after Mammon's speech, "dreaded worse than Hell, so much the fear / Of thunder and the sword of Michael," and so Moloch's speech receives little in the way of applause (*PL* 2.293-95). His argument is stunted from the beginning by the impossibility of its proposal. Given the sound thrashing the devils received at the hands of God and his heavenly host, Moloch's suggestion serves as the first point in the non-debate, but all it does is serve as an easily-rejected premise to guide the other arguments toward an insurgent

strike on Eden rather than returning to heaven to be routed again. In some ways, despite its absurdity, Moloch's call for war is closest to the Miltonic *ethos* in that he wishes to test his mettle, although his *ethos* is one based on violence rather than truth. Although the Miltonic *ethos* commends opposing *opinions* to meet on the battlefield of ideas, Moloch's call for war will fail because destruction is his aim.

After Moloch, Milton's next three orators offer variations on a similar idea: peace with heaven in some form or another. Belial, one of Milton's most pointed parodies of the ancient world's sophists, offers in an ear-pleasing "persuasive accent" his "timorous and slothful" argument following Moloch (*PL* 2.117-18). He presents himself "in act more graceful and humane: / A fairer person not lost Heav'n!" (*PL* II.108-10). Belial's speech is one for "dignity composed and high exploit," but the narrator unmasks Belial's outward beauty by revealing his oratorical duplicity: "But all was false and hollow through his tongue / Dropped manna and could make the worse appear / The better reason to perplex and dash / Maturest councils" (*PL* 2.111-15). Deriding Moloch, who seems not to have understood the significance of heaven's armies routing Satan's coup, Belial argues that their only hope is annihilation if they try to take vengeance against God (*PL* 2.142-51). Instead, his "words clothed in reason's garb," he counsels Satan to consider "ignoble ease and peaceful sloth" (*PL* 2.226-28). The narrator tells us that he is ultimately untrustworthy and possesses the ability to make the worse appear better. Belial's call for an easy, slothful solution, as the narrator tells us, could be an instance of this if we consider Milton's truth *ethos* in *Areopagitica*. Rather than seeking a solution through trial and labor, the solution for which Belial argues is one of effortlessness. It is, in this way, antithetical to the program of truth that Milton sets out in *Areopagitica*. While Moloch's pressing for war seems

utterly laughable given how easily the devils' rebellion was put down, Belial's argument establishes the tenor of the rest of the debate as peace with heaven becomes the preferred solution.

Mammon echoes this, acknowledging the futility of war renewed against God: "Him to unthroned we then / May hope when everlasting Fate shall yield / To fickle Chance, and Chaos judge the strife. / The former vain to hope argues as vain / The latter" (*PL* 2.231-35). Mammon scrutinizes the possibility of God accepting the devils back into heaven but then laments this as forcing them back into a "wearisome / Eternity so spent in worship paid" to their hated enemy—a hell worse than the "Hard liberty" of being "Free and to none accountable" (*PL* 2. 248-49; 255-57). With acceptance back into heaven out of the question, Mammon, like Belial, calls for the devils to make their home in hell, "[i]n emulation opposite to Heav'n" (*PL* 2.298). To make this home, Mammon's solution is to "create and in what place soe'er / Thrive under evil and work ease out of pain / Through labor and endurance" (*PL* 2.260-62). In light of Milton's concept of truth, this suggestion is intriguing. His argument is not for labor and endurance toward truth but rather to work "ease out of pain"—that is, to "work" to transform their discomfort into comfort. This kind of work seems an intentional perversion of the sort—the labor of truth that Milton casts as running races, working in mines, or going to war—that is crucial to discerning truth through debate. As with Belial, Mammon's argument is also to secure easy assent. In this case, the ease of his solution is simply to accept hell and make it their home.

The final member of Satan's council, Beelzebub, pleads his case, seeing how the response of the cheering devils to the previous two speeches means that popular opinion "[i]nclines, here to continue and build up here / A growing empire" (*PL* 2.314-15). Sitting second only to Satan,

Beelzebub, like Belial and Mammon, sues for peace because war had proven futile, and so argues to remain in hell; but then he adds another layer to the plan: rather than open war, Beelzebub proposes that Satan's demon army will attempt to strike at God through an "easier enterprise" (*PL* 2.345). Reminding the devils of God's new project, "some new race called Man," Beelzebub calls for the devils to focus their energies on them rather than strike at God directly. Satan's hellish horde will try man "by sudden onset, either with Hell fire / To waste His whole creation or possess / All as our own and drive, as we were driven / The puny inhabitants," using the force of their devilish might to destroy them or make them run. Or they will make a more cunning and guileful play, as Beelzebub calls for the contingent to "Seduce them to our party that their God / May prove their foe and with repenting hand / Abolish his own works" (*PL* 2.364-67). With their council thus concluded, "The bold design / Pleased highly those infernal states and joy / Sparkled in all their eyes," and Satan affirms the long debate and resulting plan as well-judged (*PL* 2.386-388).

Gradually, the devils' solutions become easier and easier, both in terms of the effort expended and psychological comfort offered. First, Moloch for open war, then Belial cowardly skulking, then Mammon to accept where they are and remake hell, and finally, Beelzebub to take Eden by seduction. Ultimately, Beelzebub's solution would be easiest because it would not require going to war, and it would allow most of the demonic horde to remain in hell. It also assuages the psychological agony of never again seeking revenge for their loss. Apart from Moloch, the speakers in these debates favor the easiest answer toward the same conclusion—a conclusion that Satan himself has orchestrated. Because Satan has pre-ordained the conclusion of this meeting and because the devils are seeking the easiest solution possible, one that does not

require much in the way of effort, no actual debate has taken place here. The devils are seeking a solution that does not require the “dust and heat” that Milton privileges as an outward sign of virtue tested through rigorous argumentation, but rather a solution that will allow them to take revenge against God with as little effort as possible. Certainly, seeking conformity has a pragmatic benefit in the real world (that is to say, not Milton’s closed universe based on Milton’s rules), but because I suggest that Milton dramatizes his concerns about rhetoric through *Paradise Lost*, he is essentially showing a worst-case scenario of what debate looks like conducted apart from truth. The devils have, in effect, gained nothing, and this debate is not about finding the wisest or best choice so much as reaffirming Satan’s initial venture. The message here, then, seems to be that easy agreement and easily-reached solutions are the ideal for devils, who, lacking an *ethos* based on truth, cannot engage in true debate. Again, while it is expedient in the real world to come to an easy accord, in Milton’s idealized vision of argument and debate, the true eloquence that he lauds requires there to be dissenting opinions, not variations on a theme to reach a pre-decided conclusion. If the devils seek easy solutions, then it is in the name of conformity, and in the next section, we will consider the implications of this conformity for Milton’s truth.

“Firm faith, and firm accord / More than can be in heav’n”

The result of this council is, of course, easy assent, which Milton describes as a devilish trait rather than one that is to be praised. From the outset of the debate, Milton’s Satan suggests that the absence of good in Hell will afford them the ability to reach a quick, easy solution:

“Where there is no good / For which to strive no strife can grow up there / From faction,” Satan thunders to his crowd (*PL* 2.30-32). As I have already pointed out in the first chapter, one of

Milton's key arguments in *Areopagitica* is that the absence of evil means there is no possibility to test one's virtue, and thus there is no possibility, at best, for debate, and at worst, for truth to emerge. In Hell, this schema is inverted, and where there is an absence of good, there too is no real opportunity for a true debate. Satan's entire purpose here is not to "search the truth" of the prophecy but rather to reach a solution that he has already determined. Because of this absence of good, Satan extols the devils' ability to unite and quickly find accord. Because "none sure will claim in Hell / Precedence, none whose portion is so small / Of present pain that with ambitious mind / Will covet more," Satan praises the absence of good as an "advantage" that will commend them "To union and firm faith and firm accord, / More than can be in Heav'n" (*PL* 2.35-37). "Union and firm faith and firm accord" are, in this case, Satanic virtues rather than godly ones. "Firm accord" evokes *Areopagitica*'s "iron yoke of outward conformity," and it is this servile yoke that stops the flow of truth through discourse. Without disagreement and the allowable disunity of sects and schisms, debate becomes little more than a show. If we take *Areopagitica* as Milton's attempt at describing an ideal *ethos* for debate, then Satan's *ethos* is antithetical to it because it silences argument by manipulating the outcome of the devils' so-called debate. This scene becomes a critique of the *ethos* of those afraid of sect and schism. Satan's lauding of unity makes it clear that apprehension sects about and schisms, the antithesis of firm accord, is a demonic fear rather than a heavenly one. Milton's concept of truth in *Areopagitica* embraces sects and schisms as part of the natural working out of truth, but the orator who fears them is unable to see their potential for reassembling truth's scattered pieces. In more pragmatic terms, this means that dissenting views are necessary to refine opinions by testing them against other

opinions. This, however, is not what Satan wants, and so it becomes clear that dissenting opinions are not welcome in this debate.

Despite all this, a moment occurs following the devils' Stygian council that might suggest that the kind of dissent Milton's commends in *Areopagitica* is actually a problem. The Miltonic narrator laments the potential of the devils to reach "firm concord" (*PL* 2.497) while humans manage only to "live in hatred, enmity and strife / Among themselves and levy cruel wars" (*PL* 2.1010-1011). This striking reproof tells us that as the devils find agreement, humanity can only manage carnage and devastation. The narrator suggests that if man were aware of the "hellish foes now besides / That day and night for his destruction wait!" (*PL* 2.504-5), then people might stop "Wasting the earth each other to destroy" (*PL* 2.502). Read in conjunction with the appositive parenthetical remark, ("which might induce us to accord") that precedes these lines, we could be deceived into thinking that the easy and firm accord the devils have reached in their farcical debate is an ideal. The fear of demonic enemies suing for the life of man should be impetus for human beings to cease their feuding and bloodshed, which will apparently lead to harmony.

This moment, promoting accord and condemning dispute, might otherwise seem to conflict with Milton's call for truth to be engaged and tested in free and open encounter; however, I suggest that there are two problems with reading the lines this way. First, these lines refer explicitly to physical violence and force: the combat that Milton condemns men for falling into in *Paradise Lost* is not rhetorical but physical. Although the combat of ideas might sound the gong of war in the world outside Milton's poetic vision, the kind of striving required to ascertain truth is rhetorical and mental, not physical. Milton's martial imagery always risks

leading us into thinking of the combat he is talking about as being waged with weapons rather than words, but this is not the case. As he writes in *Areopagitica*:

Behold now this vast City: a City of refuge, the mansion house of
liberty, encompassed and surrounded with his protection; the shop of war hath not
there more anvils and hammers waking, to fashion out the plates and instruments
of armed Justice in defence of beleaguer'd Truth, then there be pens and heads
there, sitting by their studious lamps, musing, searching, revolving new notions
and ideas wherewith to present, as with their homage and their fealty the
approaching Reformation: others as fast reading, trying all things, assenting to the
force of reason and conviction. (*CPW* 2.553-54)

While here Milton characterizes combat by and for truth as war, physical force is not the preferred method of searching for truth; rather, the “shop of war hath *not* more anvils waking” than “pens and heads” and minds working through reason and deliberation toward truth (italics mine). Milton’s truth girds herself with armor to do combat, but it is combat in the realm of rational persuasion, not violent puissance. Second, Milton laments this by suggesting that “Men only disagree / Of creatures rational, though under hope / Of Heav’nly grace and God proclaiming peace” that occurs before the turn, in which men “Yet live in hatred, enmity and strife” (*PL* 2.496-500). These lines seem to condemn humanity’s inability to reach the accord that the devils, freshly cast from heaven and making do with their new home, so easily find. In this instance the “Yet” primarily means “still,” but I suggest that it may be read as a variation of “but.” Milton suggests that disagreement is not the problem, but that when that disagreement erupts in violence and destruction, in hatred, enmity, and strife, it becomes a problem—this is not

the bond of peace that Milton suggests accompanies argumentation empowered by the love of truth. The lamentation here does not undo the positive nature of the kinds of disagreement of which humanity is capable, and that must happen for truth to emerge; instead, these lines provide a caveat and a warning not to allow beings capable of rational thought to fall so far into agreement that they become unable to express themselves through any means other than force.

Satan's opening speech establishes the terms of the debate, such as it is, and shows that what the reader is about to witness is quite different from the kind of debate that Milton privileges in *Areopagitica*. The devils' council is a kind of non-debate rather than a debate. Seemingly "open" debate not motivated by the love of truth is always doomed to be a failure or fraud, and because the devils' council is cast as a series of arguments predetermined and working toward almost the exact same end, the easy conformity of these scenes suggests that unity not found through free discourse and argument fueled by truth is demonic because it silences the possibility for discussion and dissent.

Conclusion

In *Areopagitica*, Milton privileges free and open argument, embracing the multivocality sects and schisms provide as being necessary for debate and argumentation. As I have argued in the first chapter, Milton is cultivating his own ideal rhetorical *ethos*, while in this second chapter, I have shown how Milton dramatizes the problems of debate conducted in the complete absence of truth and virtue. The way the debate resolves with "firm accord" among the devils suggests that argument conducted in the devils' mode—that is, where there is no potential for free argument and the speakers seek easy solutions instead of working toward truth—is not a true debate or argument as Milton would have it. Rather than the streaming fountain of truth, the

devils' debates are the muddied tributaries that stop truth's flow. Book 2, however, is a relatively innocuous example of what happens to rhetoric conducted by orators lacking truth as their *ethos*. While the devils come to a decision about what to do, the action is not yet taken until Book 9, and this is where Milton's aim becomes clear. By giving the devils a kind of empty rhetoric that is indifferent—or perhaps even antagonistic—toward truth, Milton offers the criticism that attempts at eloquence here will only be empty without truth. Milton's Satan sets the terms of the debate, and then the devils essentially debate about nothing because Satan has already decided what their next course of action will be. In the next chapter, however, the insidiousness of the sophistic indifference toward truth will become clear as we see truth fail to conquer error in the Garden of Eden. In Book 9, Milton's dramatic treatment of debate and argumentation reaches its clearest denunciation of sophistry through the temptation scene with Satan and Eve.

CHAPTER 3

SERPENT TONGUE: GORGIAS AND SOPHISTRY IN *PARADISE LOST**Introduction*

By depicting eloquence and the love of truth as inextricable from one another, Milton reflects on the dangers of persuasion practiced in the absence of truth in *Paradise Lost*. Where in the last chapter, I have demonstrated the failure of the devils' debate as an argument, I will now show how the consequences of oratorical performances motivated by deception rather than truth are thrown into relief in Book 9's temptation scene. Apprehension about the potential for language to be used deceptively dominates the book and brings to the forefront Milton's anxious relationship with rhetoric. Milton's relationship with rhetoric has long been a combative area of inquiry in Milton studies, whether through Irene Samuel's attempts to nuance Milton's views of rhetoric, or Stanley Fish and Thomas O. Sloane's pronouncements of Milton as wholly anti-rhetorical.⁶⁴ Studies on the poet's attitude toward persuasive speech have seen a recent resurgence as scholars such as Shore, Baumlín, and Stark have historicized it through early modern understandings of classical political philosophy, early modern theology, and the

⁶⁴ Irene Samuel's classic essay "Milton on the Province of Rhetoric," *Milton Studies* 10 (1977), 177-93 provides a thorough account of Milton's rhetorical training. In this essay, she argues for a more nuanced understanding of Milton's views of the rhetorical tradition against prevailing assumptions that Milton was entirely anti-rhetoric.

scientific movements of the seventeenth century, respectively.⁶⁵ Rather than condemning rhetoric in full, Milton, ever Augustinian in his conception of right rhetoric and truth as united, instead seems in Book 9 to condemn the Platonic conception of sophistry, which he sees as a form of persuasion that guides a speaker's audience into error rather than instructs them in truth.

In Book 9 of *Paradise Lost*, Milton presents his most pointed criticism of oratory. After years of composing his own polemical tracts, Milton places his biblical epic's most rhetorically adroit and persuasive speeches in the mouth of Satan. Satan's orations are so deceptive and effective that, as Linda Gregerson supposes, he not only exemplifies fallen rhetoric, but his rhetoric actually produces Adam and Eve's Fall.⁶⁶ In producing the fall, Milton's Satan, I argue, evokes the image of the sophist following the influence of Plato—but rather than the bumbling Gorgias whom Socrates easily disarms, Milton's Satan is dangerous in his verbal facility. To show how Milton is questioning the sophistic tradition, scholars have frequently settled on classical Roman orators such as Cicero and Quintilian or the Renaissance writer and political theorist Niccolo Machiavelli as two of Milton's key influences in depicting Satan. In this chapter, I too will revisit the question of influence. While some of these figures' theories and ideas might

⁶⁵ Samuel attempts to find balance between accounts of Milton's use of rhetoric and his views of rhetoric. Other critics have argued Milton as anti-rhetoric, as Ryan J. Stark has noted previously in "Cold Styles," *Milton Quarterly* 37, no. 1 (2003), 26 n. 1; see also Fish, *How Milton Works*, 122-24, in which he argues that Milton protests "carnal rhetoric," or rhetoric based on reason rather than faith; and Thomas O. Sloane, *Donne, Milton, and the End of Humanist Rhetoric* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 1; 249. More recent accounts that attempt to revise or complicate Milton's fraught relationship with rhetoric include Daniel Shore, *Milton and the Art of Rhetoric*; James S. Bauman, *Theologies of Language in English Renaissance Literature: Reading Shakespeare, Donne, and Milton*; Ryan J. Stark, *Rhetoric, Science, and Magic in Seventeenth-Century England*. These last studies view Milton's rhetoric through specific critical lenses—political philosophy, theology, and science, respectively.

⁶⁶ Linda Gregerson, *The Reformation of the Subject: Spenser, Milton, and the English Protestant Epic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 199.

resonate with the ancient sophists and the aspiring sophists of the Renaissance, we would be hard-pressed to describe them as sophists in the mode of classical oratory.⁶⁷

Owing to Milton's immense learning, his Satan does not correlate one-to-one with any of these figures, but is instead a chorus of many rhetorical voices. One voice too seldom considered in the polyphony of ancient orators that makes up Satan is Gorgias of Leontini—or, to be more precise, the idea of Gorgias of Leontini as imagined by Milton, early modern culture, and the writers of antiquity. While Baumlín and Pallister have both acknowledged qualities of Gorgias in Satan's rhetorical facility, critics have yet to offer a sustained exploration of Gorgias as a significant influence on Milton's Satan. Devoting much of his book *Theologies of Language in English Renaissance Literature* to the character of Gorgias, Baumlín observes that Satan's words "work their Gorgianic 'evil persuasion'" on Eve, arguing that Satan's rhetoric "aims to seduce rather than teach."⁶⁸ Likewise, Pallister, appraising Satan's eloquence in *Paradise Lost*, has noted its resemblance to that of Gorgias; he observes that Satan's persuasions of Eve are sophistic at their core, and for him, Satan's speech "reflects elements of sophism as it originated in ancient Greece"; he refers explicitly to Gorgias's idea that individual belief constructs truth.⁶⁹ While many of Pallister's arguments on Milton's rhetoric in the poetry are convincing, he ignores *Areopagitica*—indeed, much of Milton's political prose—during discussions of Milton's views of truth. Despite this, Pallister admirably traces the function of *kairos* in Satan's rhetoric but

⁶⁷ For works attributing Satan's rhetoric to these figures, see Shore, 107-112, who argues that lines 9.669-75 allude to Cicero; Pallister, 154-56, who argues Satan's rhetoric is an inversion of Cicero's notion of "wisdom speaking copiously"; and Victoria Kahn, *Machiavellian Rhetoric* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), which argues for Milton's Satan as most closely related to Machiavelli.

⁶⁸ Baumlín, *Theologies of Language*, 203.

⁶⁹ Pallister, 210.

connects it to Gorgias only insofar as he mentions Gorgias in conjunction with *kairos*.⁷⁰ This, however, seems an oversight given how closely associated Gorgias is with *kairos*.

Expanding these critics' arguments, I will argue in this chapter that Gorgias serves as a crucial model for Satan's oratorical command. As a rhetorician, Gorgias was known not only for his ability to fashion ornamented speeches *extempore* but for his mastery in observing *kairos*, the proper or right time to act. As an important precursor to Book 9, Milton's truth in *Areopagitica* nuances the reading of Satan as sophist by reinforcing Milton's truth's association with eloquence and then undermining that idea through Satan, who is the truthless orator par excellence. Hence, in this chapter, I argue that Gorgias's shadow lurks behind Satan's persuasive tactics in a way more subtle than Satan's oft-observed Ciceronian and Quintillian influences. I will begin by exploring briefly the reception of Gorgias and sophistry in the Renaissance and antiquity to show how Milton would have understood them. I will then survey Gorgias's favored rhetorical tropes and his relationship to the Greek concept *kairos* before moving to how Satan employs them in the temptation scene. Satan's rhetorical moves associate him with Gorgias through these attributes as he manipulates Eve's desire for free will. As Satan persuades in the mode of the Gorgianic orator, he then teaches Eve his rhetorical strategies. Here, we see Milton's fullest critique of sophistry begin to take shape; he depicts it as a fundamentally fraudulent deception that can only work by taking advantage of the inexperienced. By associating Satan with Gorgias through his rhetorical skill and *ethos*, Milton casts Satan, rather than Gorgias, as the true originator of sophistry.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 156; 210; 215-16; 234.

“Such prompt eloquence”: Sophistry in Early Modern England and Milton’s Gorgias

Before we explore how Gorgias’s rhetoric influences Milton’s Satan, it is necessary to historicize Gorgias’s transmission from antiquity to the Renaissance to get a sense of how Milton would have understood his brand of sophistry. What we know of Gorgias is drawn from second-hand fragments, extant texts of his work, and accounts by other writers. Traveling from Sicily to Athens with a delegation in 427 B.C.E., Gorgias was an itinerant teacher who taught students his verbal skills for a fee.⁷¹ He was tutor to a number of famous students, including Meno, Polus, and Isocrates and is, as Scott Consigny notes, thought to have influenced a number of other writers.⁷² By surveying briefly the extant texts, we can understand his epistemology and views of rhetoric. More than that, however, we can begin to see what the Renaissance rhetoricians, so keen to perfect their oratorical expertise, found so appealing about him.

The surviving fragments of Gorgias’s own work include his *Encomium to Helen* and the controversial *On Nonexistence, or On Nature*.⁷³ From such texts, his views of rhetoric and his epistemological perspective begin to become clearer. Because of its views on persuasive language, we will begin with *The Encomium of Helen*. In the *Encomium*, we have Gorgias’s most complete attitude toward his art—that rhetoric can be used to make the stronger position seem the weaker, and to justify the unjust, when he attempts to exonerate Helen of Troy by arguing that she was either a victim of the gods, lies, force, or speech.⁷⁴ In *On Nonexistence*, Gorgias

⁷¹ George S. Kennedy, “Gorgias: Life and Teachings,” in *The Older Sophists*, 30-31; MacPhail, 23-24. In both of these works, the authors recount how the first-century historian Diodorus Siculus chronicles Gorgias’s diplomatic embassy to Athens.

⁷² Scott Consigny, *Gorgias: Sophist and Artist* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001), 7.

⁷³ Because Gorgias’s *Defense of Palamedes* attempts roughly the same project as *Encomium of Helen* without the meta-commentary on his theories, I will elide discussion of it in the interest of not repeating myself.

⁷⁴ Gorgias, *The Encomium of Helen*, in *The Older Sophists*, 61.

displays skepticism about both truth and language's potential for meaningful communication. The three tenets of his epistemology in this piece are that, first, nothing exists. Second, if it did exist, it could not be communicated. Finally, if it could be communicated, it would be incomprehensible.⁷⁵ This is the piece that first earned Gorgias the nickname "the Nihilist," but this reading, Consigny points out, is unprofitable because it undermines the text itself: by the third part of *On Nonexistence*, Gorgias has affirmed that things *do* exist—he is simply unconvinced of language's ability to express them accurately.⁷⁶ Because of the dearth of primary texts by Gorgias, we have a portrait of him that is at best fuzzy and reconstructed from the accounts of both his friends and enemies. These accounts, of course, cannot give us the whole history, and so he remains, as Consigny says, "elusive and enigmatic," a notably polarizing figure in the studies of both philosophy and rhetoric.⁷⁷ However, this chapter is—admittedly ironically, given the subject-matter of the thesis—unconcerned with the veracity of accounts of Gorgias. Rather, for positing a relationship between Gorgias and Satan, the mythical Gorgias, constructed by the public imaginations of antiquity and the Renaissance as the progenitor of the sophistic arts, proves more useful in considering how he might have influenced Milton's sophistic fiend.

Gorgias's reputation in accounts from ancient Greece and Rome is largely second-hand and fragmented, but these accounts depict him as the father of oratory or simply a rhetorical innovator. Gorgias's student Isocrates presents a less idealized vision of Gorgias; Gorgias, Isocrates says, acquired wealth but died unmarried, leaving a small fortune behind because of his

⁷⁵ Ibid., 52.

⁷⁶ Consigny, 38-39.

⁷⁷ Consigny, 2-3.

itinerant lifestyle.⁷⁸ As we move further away from Isocrates, mentions of Gorgias start to become more fantastic, acquiring extra details that make them resemble legends and tales. Accounts of him usually note his longevity. Cicero mentions that Gorgias lived to be over one hundred years old and commends him as an excellent rhetorician and master of Isocrates.⁷⁹ Cicero writes in *De Oratore* that Gorgias was the first to have tried the rhetorical figures of antithesis and parison (phrases with corresponding structures, i.e. nouns match nouns, adjectives match adjectives, and so on), noting his inventive acumen for eloquent speech.⁸⁰ Cicero's fellow countryman Quintilian echoes the common story that Gorgias lived a long life, which is further corroborated by the writings of Athenaeus, Pliny, and Aelian.⁸¹ Quintilian places Gorgias as developing his oratorical practices shortly after Corax and his student Tisias, who are now thought to be the first practitioners of rhetoric.⁸² After these earlier accounts, Gorgias begins to be commended as one of the originators of the sophistic arts. Besides corroborating claims that Gorgias lived to be over one hundred years old, the sophist Philostratus of Lemnos lauds Gorgias as the originator of extemporaneous oratory and even boldly proclaims him the founder of the oldest types of sophistry.⁸³ Sometimes renowned for his innovative rhetorical style and sometimes celebrated, however erroneously, as the inventor of sophistry, Gorgias commanded

⁷⁸ Sprague, 37.

⁷⁹ Cicero, *Cato Major* (London, 1648), C3v-r.

⁸⁰ Cicero, *De Oratore*, in *The Older Sophists*, 40.

⁸¹ Pliny, excerpt from *Natural History*, in *The Older Sophists*, 36; Athenaeus, excerpt from *Untitled*, in *The Older Sophists*, 36; Aelian, excerpt from *Miscellaneous History*, in *The Older Sophists*, 37.

⁸² Thomas M. Conley, *Rhetoric in the European Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 4.

⁸³ Philostratus, *The Lives of the Sophists* (New York: G.P. Putnam, 1912), 6-7; 29.

respect among many of the rhetoricians and philosophers. Of course, not all ancient accounts of Gorgias are either neutral or laudatory.

Gorgias drew the ire of two of the most significant minds of the ancient philosophical tradition in Plato and Aristotle, and they developed their theories of rhetoric in direct opposition to the sophists' ethical ambiguity. Their works offer an appraisal of Gorgias as a man gifted in oratory but whose amoral attitude toward rhetoric predisposed him to use his powers for deception.⁸⁴ In *Gorgias*, Plato's Socrates easily bests a caricature of Gorgias and two of his disciples, Polus and Callicles, by concluding that rhetoric is an innate skill to manipulate people that can be cultivated but not taught.⁸⁵ In *Phaedrus*, Socrates condemns rhetoric as duplicitous and remarks to his student that Tisias and Gorgias were known for preferring probability to truth and making "large things appear small and small things large by force of speech."⁸⁶ Aristotle describes Gorgias as the progenitor of a poetic style "speaking sweet nothings" that could easily sway the uneducated.⁸⁷ Despite the otherwise positive reception of Gorgias, Plato and Aristotle's treatments of Gorgias charted the course for his reception in western civilization in the years between antiquity and the Renaissance. As either sophistic hero or oratorical charlatan, Gorgias comes to the Renaissance bearing the twin burdens of fame and infamy.

As I noted in the Introduction, early modern English oratory privileged eloquent speech in the development and education of politically engaged thinkers and speakers, and Gorgias's reception in the Renaissance reflects this fascination with verbal dexterity. The reception of

⁸⁴ George S. Kennedy, "Introduction," in Aristotle, *On Rhetoric*, 12.

⁸⁵ Plato, *Gorgias*, in *Gorgias, Menexenus, Protagoras*, ed. Malcolm Schofield and trans. Tom Griffith (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 463b.

⁸⁶ Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. Christopher Rowe (New York: Penguin, 2005), 267a5-b1.

⁸⁷ Aristotle, *On Rhetoric*, 197.

Gorgias in early modern England suggests that some early modern orators read these earlier accounts of him and, despite the depiction of him as a fraud playing at philosophy in Plato's works, found his indifference to truth and unequivocal belief in the power of language appealing. As mentioned in the introduction, the Latin translation of many rhetoric texts had much to do with the transmission of the sophistic tradition to the Renaissance; from the way Renaissance writers spoke of Gorgias, we begin to understand his reception in this period.⁸⁸ In *The Foundacion of Rhetorike* (1563), Richard Rainolde writes that Gorgias was "a bulwarke and staie to Athens and all Grece."⁸⁹ Probably following Quintilian, the German writer Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa refers to Gorgias alongside Corax and Tisias as the first to teach or write down rhetorical manuals.⁹⁰ The seventeenth-century French-English scholar Méric Casaubon praises Gorgias for his powerful extemporaneous speeches and for dedicating "himself to the study of eloquent and readie language," as well as "devising severall schemes and figures of Rhetorick that had not been thought of before."⁹¹ Despite such glowing approbation, Gorgias did not receive universal acclaim, but deprecatory opinions seem to be far fewer than those praising him. *The Art of Rhetorique* (1553), Thomas Wilson takes a dimmer view of Gorgias, accusing him of praising unrighteousness.⁹² An extract from a collection of French treatises in which a group of philosophers claimed to determine which ancient philosopher was "best" also denounces Gorgias for claiming to be able to argue any opinion: "For compare a Gorgias Leontinus, or other

⁸⁸ MacPhail 24.

⁸⁹ Richard Rainolde, *A Booke Called the Foundacion of Rhetorike* (London, 1563), F2Jv.

⁹⁰ Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa, "On Rhetoric," in *Renaissance Debates on Rhetoric*, ed. Wayne Rebhorn (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 77.

⁹¹ Méric Casaubon, *A Treatise Concerning Enthusiasme* (London, 1655), A5v.

⁹² Thomas Wilson, *The Arte of Rhetorique* (London, 1553), Fol.8r.

Sophister of old time, or one of the most vers'd in Philosophy in this age,...; the first will torture his wit into a thousand postures, to feigen and perswade to the hearers what himself knows not, and by distinctions cast dust in their eyes.”⁹³ In *Atheomastix Clearing Foure Truthes, Against Atheists and Infidels*, Martin Fotherby concludes Gorgias’s efficacy as a speaker “was rather in the peoples false opinion and ascription than in his true possession” than in Gorgias’s wisdom or knowledge.⁹⁴ Such pointed disdain for Gorgias in the Renaissance, however, seems to depend on the writer’s aims—if one is attempting to praise eloquence, then Gorgias is admirable; if, however, one seeks to confute atheism, then Georgia’s sophistries and contingent truths become a straw man to knock down. In the Renaissance, opinion of Gorgias is as divided as in antiquity.

Assuredly, Milton would have been familiar with this Renaissance Gorgias, but given his capacious education, also would have known of him from the classical texts to which he devoted many hours of study—especially the Gorgias parodied and denounced by Plato and Aristotle.⁹⁵ Plato’s renunciation of sophistry cast a pall over the reputation of the sophistic rhetoricians, and Milton’s views of truth and rhetoric suggest that he too would have disdained Gorgias’s subjective truths and clever rhetorical wit that claimed to be eloquence.⁹⁶ Milton’s education, from the private tutors of his childhood through his time at St. Paul’s School and then at Cambridge, afforded him the opportunity to study a multitude of topics, including the

⁹³ Bureau d’Adresse et de Recontre, *A Generall Collection of Discourses of the Virtuosi of France, Upon Questions of all Sorts of Philosophy*, trans. G. Havers (London, 1664).

⁹⁴ Martin Fotherby, *Atheomastix Clearing Foure Truthes, Against Atheists and Infidels* (London, 1621), Q2r.

⁹⁵ Irene Samuel, *Plato and Milton* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1947), 17.

⁹⁶ MacPhail, 21. “The decisive episode in the fortune of the sophists is the career of Plato, whose dialogues established an invincible prejudice that screens nearly all our tenuous knowledge of these figures.”

rhetoricians of antiquity.⁹⁷ Following his study at Cambridge, Milton undertook a seven-year, self-directed reading plan, “entirely devoted,” as he states in the *Second Defense of the English People*, “to the perusal of the Greek and Latin classics” (CPW 4.614). He demonstrates his intimate familiarity with Plato’s work in *An Apology against a Pamphlet* (CPW 1.879-91).⁹⁸ Milton’s extensive reading of Plato, especially, and of Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian, all of whom mention Gorgias, suggest that Milton certainly would have known who Gorgias was. More than likely, however, Milton would have known Gorgias and the sophists through Plato’s lampooning of Gorgias in the Socratic dialogues. Plato and Aristotle’s philosophical discourses had developed as a direct reaction against the influence of the sophists, who taught their rhetorical craft to willing students for a fee. Given Milton’s education and the references in his earlier polemical works to authors who treat Gorgias, it is no leap to suggest that Milton could have had him in mind as equally as Cicero or Quintilian when he presents Satan’s eloquent motions as “some orator renowned / In Athens or free Rome where eloquence / Flourished” (PL 9.670-72). As Irene Samuel has shown in her work exhaustively cataloging Milton’s footnotes, references to Plato’s *Phaedrus* and *Gorgias* abound in *Of Education* and *Reason of Church-Government*.⁹⁹ Through the classical texts and the received opinion of the Renaissance alike, Milton would have almost assuredly known who Gorgias was, and his views would have been colored by his reading of Aristotle and Plato. Now that I have surveyed Gorgias’s reception in

⁹⁷ For a thorough account of Milton’s education and private study, see Lewalski, 19-79. For Milton’s rhetorical education, also see Clark, 118.

⁹⁸ Samuel, *Plato and Milton*, 17.

⁹⁹ Irene Samuel, *Plato and Milton*, 16-17.

both antiquity and the Renaissance, I will explore Gorgias's rhetorical strategies and the tropes and figures most often associated with him.

"Occasion which now smiles": Gorgianic Rhetoric, Kairos, and Mutable Truth

According to the extant texts and what we know of Gorgias from these other sources, Gorgias's rhetorical style depends upon two factors: first, in terms of style, he is associated with the Gorgianic figures; and second, in terms of method, the observation of *kairos* characterizes much about his style. The Renaissance authors' esteem of Gorgias was partially based on his adroit rhetorical facility, as Casaubon notes, and he achieved this reputation by adorning his orations with several recurring figures, which have been collectively named the Gorgianic figures. As Consigny notes, scholars have compiled them by studying Gorgias's extant texts and commentaries by other ancient writers, who often attribute to Gorgias six frequently-recurring rhetorical figures. These include *antithesis* (the joining of contrasting ideas), *parechresis* (alliteration, to which Baumlin adds assonance), *anadiplosis* (the repetition of entire words), *homoiooteleuton* (the repetition of word endings that sound similar in successive words and clauses), *parisosis* (the arrangement of balanced clauses and phrases, sometimes called *isocolon*), and finally *paranomasia* (punning).¹⁰⁰ These tropes form the stylistic half of Gorgias's rhetorical program; when added to Gorgias's notion of *kairos*, the Gorgianic rhetorician—at least, the mythologized version of it that occupied the imaginations of the oratorically-minded in antiquity and the Renaissance—becomes a powerful persuasive force.

In the *Encomium*, Gorgias attempts to rehabilitate Helen of Troy's reputation, and through it we learn a bit about how the ancient and Renaissance readers of Gorgias might have

¹⁰⁰ Consigny, 156; Baumlin, *Theologies of Language*, 5.

understood his own orientation toward rhetoric. For Gorgias, language functions as a kind of enchantment: “There have been discovered two arts of witchcraft and magic: one consists of errors of soul and the other of deceptions of opinion.”¹⁰¹ For Gorgias part of rhetorical persuasion involves creating these “deceptions of opinion” to persuade one’s audience. He describes the “force of persuasion” prevailing, and argues that it succeeds by speech constraining “the soul, persuading it which it persuaded, both to believe the things said and to approve the things done. The persuader, like a constrainer, does the wrong and the persuaded, like the constrained, in speech is wrongly charged.”¹⁰² The one who is persuaded by speech is not to blame because his or her agency is disabled by the Gorgianic rhetorician’s words. Gorgianic rhetoric, as Baumlin suggests, commits a kind of violence against the hearer and holds the audience captive under its persuasive charm.¹⁰³ James Crosswhite agrees: “The character of Gorgias sees rhetoric as an essentially overpowering power, similar to violent power. Rhetoric is a fight because human relations are essentially a contest of power.”¹⁰⁴ Through these persuasions of opinion, the rhetorician works to circumvent the hearer’s agency and charm them into assent through speech.

Part of the theoretical aspect of providing these opinions, then, is *kairos*. The notion of *kairos* is a critical part of Gorgias’s rhetoric, and it is crucial to his reception in the popular imagination. *Kairos*—καῖρός in Greek—can be defined in several ways, but many of them have to do with time and opportunity. The most frequently occurring usage in the *Liddell-Scott-Jones*

¹⁰¹ Gorgias, *The Encomium of Helen*, in *The Older Sophists*, 52.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Baumlin, *Theologies of Language*, 6.

¹⁰⁴ James Crosswhite, *Deep Rhetoric: Philosophy, Reason, Violence, Justice, Wisdom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 119.

Greek-English Lexicon shows the word as meaning “exact or critical time, season, opportunity,” but also “due measure,” “proportion,” time,” and “period.”¹⁰⁵ The mythical personage of Gorgias handed down from antiquity to the Renaissance was, as MacPhail points out, lionized as “the undisputed hero of *kairos*.”¹⁰⁶ At the end of the *Encomium*, Gorgias concludes that the piece is merely an exercise—a “diversion,” he calls it—to test his rhetorical abilities, but we get enough of Gorgias’s overarching view of *kairos* to begin sketching a picture of it.¹⁰⁷ Gorgias tells us:

All who have and do persuade people of things do so by molding a false argument. For if all men on all subjects had both memory of things past and awareness of things present and foreknowledge of the future, speech would not be similarly similar, since as things are now it is not easy for them to recall the past nor to consider the present nor to predict the future.¹⁰⁸

Without the knowledge of the past or future to help guide one’s persuasive oratory, the present is all there is, and one must be ready to seize the moment. Of course, because one can never *know* when a *kairotic* moment is going to occur, and it is difficult to discern a *kairotic* moment until it has already passed, Gorgias’s theory of *kairos* is not one that is easy to articulate and, like the Miltonic truth, is something that seems to be more of an ideal to which one should aspire rather than a theory that can be easily replicated. We can understand *kairos* as maintaining an awareness of one’s condition and the options available, and seizing them at the right moment.

¹⁰⁵ *The Liddell-Scott-Jones Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. “Kairos.” (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996) <http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/lsg/#eid=53563&context=lsj&action=from-search> (accessed November 15, 2013).

¹⁰⁶ MacPhail, 106.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 54.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 52.

More important than the practical application of *kairos*, however, is its inextricability from Gorgias's indifference to truth and its implications for the concept of rhetorical *ethos* in *Paradise Lost*. The contingent timing that governs how one approaches and reacts to situations means that one is able to fashion oneself at a moment's notice, and truth becomes contingent upon whatever *ethos* the rhetorician is able to project. Gorgias, writes MacPhail, "has no fixed identity, for he takes his role from time, *extempore*."¹⁰⁹ Gorgias's rhetorical strategies are contingent on the idea of the right time to act, bolstered by his own views on the ambiguity of words and his elegant speeches. This *kairos*, the construction of reality according to the moment, functions as an anti-truth. Rather than the fixed and stable truth of Milton's *Areopagitica*, that seems Protean and shifting because it is impossible for fallen humans to grasp, Gorgias's rhetorical practice suggests that truth is constructed by speakers to perform speech acts. Truth as a construction has consequences for its stability; namely, that it has none. Because truth becomes relative to the weighing of opinions, it, as Pallister notes, "effectively becomes whatever one can be persuaded to believe."¹¹⁰ Baumlin juxtaposes these two ideas as two opposing sides when he writes that the sophistic "truth changes with time; for the Christian, truth is fulfilled and revealed in time. Thus, we note the significant epistemological distinctions separating what are, in fact, competing sophistic and Christian *kairoi*, the former proceeding from a radical skepticism that reduces truth...to a Nietzschean will to power."¹¹¹ Cast as a Gorgianic rhetorician, Milton's

¹⁰⁹ MacPhail, 106.

¹¹⁰ Pallister, 210.

¹¹¹ Baumlin "Ciceronian Decorum," in *Rhetoric and Kairos: Essays in History, Theory, and Praxis*, ed. Phillip Sipiora and James S. Baumlin (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 158.

Satan's rhetorical force hinges upon the constantly fluctuating present, and Milton exaggerates the effects of rhetoric that reduces truth to circumstance in Eve's temptation by Satan.

Serpent Tongue Gorgianic

In the following section, I will argue that Milton casts his Satan as a Gorgianic sophist in the temptation scene in the Garden of Eden, thereby allowing Milton to dramatize the conflict as he sees it between truth and rhetoric. Although Milton argues throughout the course of his career that truth will defeat error, he presents the threat of the sophistic impulse's contingent truth during the rhetorical struggle between Satan and Eve. Examining the many rhetorical resonances between Satan and Gorgias makes Milton's critique of the sophist and the reputed father of the sophists clear: the force of sophistry is so powerful that even in the Garden of Eden, in paradise, truth is still at risk of being undermined.

At the start of Book 9, Eve echoes the importance of searching for truth by testing one's virtue, echoing Milton in *Areopagitica*. After Satan has entered the garden, Eve proposes that she and Adam should work separately in order to complete their tasks more efficiently. The two realize that "their work outgrew / The hands' dispatch of two, gardening so wide" (*PL* 9.202-3). To slow the garden's progress, Eve proposes a plan: "Adam, well may we labor still to dress / This garden, still to tend plant, herb and flow'r, / ... / Let us divide our labors, thou where choice / Leads thee or where most needs..." (*PL* 9.205-15). Eve's word "choice" here is significant—she wishes to exercise her free will, making her own decisions about where her work should go. When Adam reminds Eve of the danger, she argues that she will not be "straitened by a foe / Subtle or violent," and supposing she does encounter danger, Eve asks: "And what is faith, love,

virtue unassayed, / Alone, without exterior help sustained?” (*PL* 9.335-36). The language she uses here even echoes the passage from *Areopagitica* that I considered in the first chapter as providing a blueprint to Milton’s *ethos* in that text:

As therefore the state of man now is, what wisdom can there be to choose, what continence to forbear without the knowledge of evil? He that can apprehend and consider vice with all her baits and seeming pleasures, and yet abstain, and yet distinguish, and yet prefer that which is truly better, he is the true warfaring Christian. I cannot praise a fugitive and cloister’d virtue, unexercis’d & unbreath’d, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race, where that immortall garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat. (*CPW* 2.515)

In order to choose, Eve needs to be able to discern between good and evil, but because evil has not yet spoiled the garden, she understands only good. As I mentioned when constructing what Milton’s truth *ethos* for rhetoric might look like based on *Areopagitica*, the truth-seeker’s virtue must be vigorously tested, but this can only occur if the seeker understands vice and is able to resist. Doing so without the knowledge of evil can only lead to error. Because Adam and Eve lack sufficient knowledge of evil, they could not engage evil effectively and test their virtue, despite Eve desiring to prove her “constancy” (*PL* 9.366). Were Adam and Eve to succeed in testing their virtue, as Milton puts it in *Areopagitica*, their virtue would become the “blank virtue,” the “excremental whiteness” that is not, in fact, virtue at all because it goes untested and unburnished within the purifying fires of falsity and error.

When Eve moves to test her virtue, Adam argues that rather than approving her constancy, it would be better for Eve to approve her obedience (*PL* 9.368). To obey requires one to choose, and with God's gift of free will, there is always the potential danger that one will make the wrong choice. Obedience would keep her from choosing incorrectly. Eve, however, is drawn by this inner desire to exercise her free will, which makes Man "secure from outward force" but "[w]ithin himself / The danger lies, yet lies within his power" (*PL* 9.347-49). That power, of course, lies in the free will that God has bestowed upon Adam and Eve. Adam continues:

Against his will he can receive no harm.
 But God left free the will, for what obeys
 Reason is free, and Reason he made right
 But bid her well beware and still erect
 Lest by some fair appearing good surprised
 She dictate false and misinform the will
 To do what God expressly hath forbid. (*PL* 9.351-56)

All Adam and Eve had to do is to resist the temptation from without and remain obedient to God's command. When Eve meets Satan in the garden, however, her inexperience with evil makes her susceptible to Satan's Gorgianic oratorical displays, which circumvent the hearer's will through a violent, forceful persuasion. By presenting itself as beautiful, ornamented, and granting an easy outcome, the Gorgianic sophistic deceives the hearer into making choices that he or she might otherwise not make. This is not only a question of Satan's rhetorical strategies but a question of *ethos*, as Satan is able to present himself in the form of the unthreatening

serpent, one that “none would suspicious mark / As from his wit and native subtlety” of being capable of violence or physical force (*PL* 9.92-93). If we consider one’s *ethos* as a dwelling place, then Satan has chosen to inhabit an outward face that, to Eve, lacked the character of danger. Of course, this becomes paradoxical because Eve does not know evil yet, and so she cannot know danger, but the point stands: even if she had possessed some understanding of danger, Satan’s *ethos* here is perfectly cultivated to deceive her. When Adam and Eve turn against each other by Book 9’s conclusion, she suggests as much, telling Adam that had he been there he “couldst not have discerned / Fraud in the serpent, speaking as he spake, / No ground of enmity between us known, / Why he should mean me ill or seek to harm” (*PL* 9.1149-52). By inhabiting the serpent and offering convincing sophistries, Satan manages to deceive Eve into thinking that his *ethos* is harmless rather than malicious. His *ethos*, his character, was utterly inscrutable.

True to the Gorgias of the ancient and early modern popular imaginations, Milton’s Satan observes *kairos* to deceive Eve. When Satan searches for Eve to bring his plan to fruition, Milton writes this as a precarious moment in the poem, Eden, and history: “Thou never from that hour in Paradise / Found’st either sweet repast or sound repose, / Such ambush hid among sweet flow’rs and shades” (*PL* 9.406-408). Milton casts this as a moment of *kairos* even more concretely as his Satan recognizes this as his moment to act, seizes his chance: “He wished, but not with hope / Of what so seldom chanced when to his wish / Beyond his hope Eve separate he spies” (*PL* 9.422-24). In stumbling upon Eve in her brief separation from Adam, Satan has happened upon more than just a chance to catch her alone; in her enthusiasm to test her virtue, Eve becomes amenable to Satan’s verbal enchantments.

Having been already warned by Raphael of Satan's approach, Eve should be vigilant against Satan's persuasion, but part of the key to her fall resides in how Satan manages to anticipate her psychology and take advantage of her desire to exercise her ability to choose. Satan's observation of *kairos* is vital to how he observes Eve in her preparation for leaving Adam. Upon entering the garden as an incorporeal apparition, Satan "sought where to lie hid" (*PL* 9.75-76) and Adam, with an ironic clairvoyance, expresses his fear that the enemy "Watches no doubt with greedy hope to find / His wish and best advantage" (*PL* 9.258-59). After inhabiting the serpent, Satan "Waited with hellish rancor imminent," seeking both Adam and Eve but wishing to find Eve separate (*PL* 9.409; *PL* 9.422-23). When Satan finds her, he gleefully exclaims, "Then let me not let pass / Occasion which now smiles: behold alone / The woman opportune to all attempts" (*PL* 9.479-81). This "Occasion which now smiles," this opportunity to encounter apart from her husband, whose "higher intellectual" capacity the serpent fears, is the *kairotic* moment that Gorgias is known in the popular consciousness as being able to control (*PL* 9.483).

Of course, this raises the question of how Eve, having been warned of danger in the Garden, still falls prey to it. Eve has been made "sufficient to have stood, though free to fall," which renders her vulnerable to rhetorical combat with Satan (*PL* 3.99). She, as Pallister and Fish both agree, lacks the logical facility of Adam; Pallister extends Fish's claim by arguing that the perfect expressions of logic and rhetoric were bestowed upon Adam to protect him against the sort of eloquence that would undermine faith, but Eve does not possess those faculties as

¹¹² Pallister, 216.

readily as Adam.¹¹² Pallister cites the moment from Book 4, when the narrator first introduces them, as evidence that Milton's God has slighted her:

The image of their glorious Maker shone:
 Truth, wisdom, sanctitude severe and pure,
 ... Though both
 Not equal as their sex equal seemed;
 For contemplation he and valor formed,
 For softness she and sweet attractive grace,
 He for God only, she for God in him. (*PL* 4.292-99)

Pallister focuses on the suggestion that they are "both / Not equal" and argues that because Eve does not understand logic as well as Adam, she cannot be as well-versed in rhetoric, and thus she becomes vulnerable to Satan's deceptions.¹¹³ Although Milton casts Eve as unequal, when we take into account the dangers of sophistry, a possible purpose in doing so becomes clear: because a knowledge of eloquence shields against verbal persuasion, a lack of education in rhetoric renders one vulnerable to the suggestions of sophistry. In the pre-lapsarian Eden where Adam and Eve are created only with that with which God has imbued them, as Pallister suggests, God's creating Eve less sufficient than Adam, coupled with her desire to exercise her ability to choose, renders her vulnerable in oratorical combat.¹¹⁴ The way, then, that Eve would have acquired a more thorough education in rhetoric and logic becomes another of the text's interpretive paradoxes as God created Eve without the necessary skill to defend herself. Wherever the blame

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 217.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

should fall, however, I am less interested in either the theological mechanisms that explain Eve's fall, or accusing Milton of unfortunate patriarchal and misogynistic tendencies—the byproducts of his Christianity and the time in which he lived. By having Satan take advantage of Eve's desire for free will, Milton critiques sophistic rhetoric that impedes its audience's accuracy of choice and judgment by misrepresenting the consequences of their decision.

When Satan approaches Eve, his verbal seduction of her preys upon her desire for choice. Whether Satan would have known of Eve's conversation with Adam is irrelevant because he still manages to persuade her based upon her will to make her own decisions. Milton seems not to be striving for psychological realism but instead using these scenes to make a broader point about the dangers of sophistic persuasion. Eve manages to fend off Satan's initial attempts at flattery, being initially suspicious and questioning his "serpent tongue organic" (*PL* 9.528-48; 560-65). After spinning a tale of how the pleasing odor from the fruit of a particular tree left him unable to resist its allure, he entices her with his description of its delicious taste and the "strange alteration" that it wrought within him, bestowing upon him the abilities to speak and reason (*PL* 9.580-95). Eve remains suspicious of him, noting that his overpraising of both her and his experience "leaves in doubt / The virtue of that fruit in thee first proved" (*PL* 9.615-16). And yet her curiosity is piqued. When she follows Satan to the tree, however, she finds that it is the tree that God commanded she and Adam not touch. She protests to Satan:

But of this tree we may not taste nor touch;

God so commanded and left his command

Sole daughter of His voice. The rest we live

Law to ourselves: our reason is our law. (*PL* 9.651-54)

God, has in essence, given Adam and Eve the ability to choose, but only one of those choices is correct. This is the moment—“She scarce had said, though brief”—that Satan finds to move upon her (*PL* 9.665). After Eve tells Satan that she and Adam are left to reason the other laws for themselves, Satan realizes how he might persuade Eve: to make reasoning about eating the fruit a matter of choice rather than an unbreakable commandment from almighty God. When Satan exercises his rhetorical might on Eve, he shifts from unthreatening snake to dangerous sophist, enacting the full power of his oratory prowess to persuade Eve. The narrator describes him as follows:

The Tempter, but with show of love and zeal,
 To Man, and indignation at his wrong,
 New parts put on and as to passion moved
 Fluctuates disturbed, yet comely, and in act
 Raised as of some great matter to begin.
 As when of old some orator renowned
 In Athens or free Rome where eloquence
 Flourished (since mute) to some great cause addressed... (*PL* 9.667-73)

He ascribes to the fruit the power “to trace the ways / Of highest agents deemed however wise”—that is, to question the dictates of God through reason and logic (*PL* 9.682-83). He cuts through her possible options: “Ye shall not die. / How should ye? By the fruit? It gives you life / To knowledge,” reminding her that, as she can see with her own eyes, he stands before her unharmed (*PL* 9.685-90). He questions the logic of denying her the knowledge the fruit affords: “Shall that be shut to Man which to the beast / Is open?” (*PL* 9.691). He reduces eating the fruit

to a “petty trespass” such that God will instead praise her “dauntless virtue whom the pain of death denounced” (*PL* 9.692-95). He then exploits her lack of understanding of evil, claiming that the knowledge of it would lead “to happier life” and then even questioning the very existence of evil: “Of good, how just? Of evil (if what is evil / Be real) why not known since easier shunned?” (*PL* 9.697-699). To know evil, Satan argues, would make it easier to shun, and while this is in line with Milton’s conception of truth in *Areopagitica*, it creates a paradox here. Eve, who could remain sinless by not knowing evil, cannot test her virtue without knowing evil. By using this line of reasoning, Satan has played upon the desire to exercise her free will with which God has imbued Adam and Eve. By eating of the tree, Satan says, she will then understand good and evil and have the ability to choose between them (*PL* 9.704-709). He concludes by suggesting that because good and evil, enclosed in the tree, belong to God, then what will it harm God if it all belongs to Him? (*PL* 9.725-30). Like the Gorgianic sophist, he has observed what it would take to persuade her, seized upon the *kairotic* moment when she is most open to his persuasion, and then reduced the commands of God to opinion, rhetorically stripping them of their consequences and creating new truths by ruling out the possibility that the tree could be dangerous. In using Eve’s ability to choose, he has made the worse choice seem the better—and only—choice.

While Milton’s Satan observes the Gorgianic *kairos*, his employment of the Gorgianic figures confirms Satan as Milton’s version of the Gorgianic sophist. While he uses too many figures to list them all here, I will attempt a survey of how they inflect his speech. He most frequently employs *parechresis* to allure Eve with his alliterative and attractive words. For instance, when his “fraudulent temptation” begins, he tells Eve that he approaches “*thee thus*

and gazes / Insatiate” (*PL* 9.535, italics mine). He combines *parechresis* with *anadiplosis*, and he claims to have watched her “With ravishment beheld, there best beheld” [italics mine] (*PL* 9.541). Satan claims that, having eaten of the fruit, he “with capacious mind / Considered all things visible in heav’n” (*PL* 9.603-604, italics mine). In addition to *parechresis*, Satan also makes frequent use of *anadiplosis*, the repetition of words not in alliterative constructions. He describes “A goddess among gods adored and served,” with an example of *homoiooteleuton* in the repeated endings. Satan’s speech is not only the “Language of man pronounced / By tongue of brute,” but it is instead the language of man ornamented and made beautiful to persuade Eve, who has shown a predilection for pretty things earlier in the poem and is therefore attracted by his speech (*PL* 9.553-55, italics mine). It is ultimately through this observation of *kairos* and the Gorgianic figures that Satan’s “words replete with guile” win their “too easy entrance” into Eve’s heart (*PL* 9.733-35, italics mine).

Perhaps for Milton the problem with the Gorgianic sophist’s ornamented speeches is that they become so enticing that they manage to overcome even the most obedient of wills, as we see happen to Eve. Despite her protests, Satan manages to find that which she desires—admiration—and exploits it alongside through her lack of understanding of evil to persuade her. Rhetorical persuasion becomes, as Baumlin notes, a kind of violence that overtakes the hearer’s will against their better judgment. Where Benjamin Myers argues that no violence is done to Adam and Eve because seduction, flattery, and lies do not constitute “coercion of the human will” and Eve freely chooses her fall, Satan’s sophistic rhetoric is, in fact, coercion as Satan twists the reasoning capabilities of Adam and Eve to deceive them into accepting his line of

reasoning, which states that if they eat of the tree, they shall not die.¹¹⁵ As Gorgias puts it, words spoken persuasively are nothing but “a false argument” with the power to ravish weaker beings “with the force of the mighty.”¹¹⁶ Although a rhetorician would reject Gorgias’s claim that persuasion is always false, persuasion as falsity, which has been so imposed on Gorgias by the mythical legacy surrounding him after the overwhelming influence of Plato, would appeal to Milton in presenting his Satan as a sophist capable of exploiting language to orchestrate his subversive plan from Book 2.

Rather than interpreting these scenes as commentaries solely on Eve’s sufficiency, I have shifted the focus of the argument to Satan, or rather, to what Milton is saying about sophistry in his depiction of Satan. Satan, as I have argued, has been cast as a Gorgianic sophist based not only on Milton’s describing him as an ancient orator but also through his seizing of *kairotic* moments and employment of Gorgias’s figures. There is an implicit critique of sophistic oratory at play here when we consider the possible Gorgianic influence on the portrayal of Satan. Unlike the Miltonic *ethos* that seeks out combat on equal ground to test virtue so that truth might emerge, sophism opportunistically preys on those who are ill able to defend themselves; had Eve, as Pallister argues, been versed in rhetorical persuasion, she might have stood a chance against Satan’s dazzling displays.¹¹⁷ Following Fish, Baumlin writes that the only antidote against this kind of rhetoric is rhetoric itself, which can provide a way to self-defense.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Benjamin Myers, *Milton’s Theology of Freedom* (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 2006), 116.

¹¹⁶ Gorgias, *The Encomium of Helen*, in *The Older Sophists*, 52.

¹¹⁷ Pallister, 216.

¹¹⁸ Stanley Fish, *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 69-70; Baumlin, *Theologies of Language*, 14.

Instead of arguing that Eve is less sufficient to stand than Adam, I suggest instead that neither, alone, could have been sufficient to stand against Satan's snares without being empowered by an *ethos* of truth—an *ethos* that, without an understanding of evil, neither can fully access. The antidote of rhetoric is, of course, only available to fallen humans. As with much of the poem, this problem becomes circular: if they cannot know evil without being fallen, then they cannot know truth without being fallen, and they cannot choose wisely without being fallen. However, by considering Book 9 as a commentary instead on the dangers of unchecked rhetorical persuasion, the paradoxes become less of a concern because they do not necessarily require solving—they are, instead, present to dramatize the problems of rhetorical persuasion to show how rhetorical persuasion conducted by a rhetorician of a duplicitous *ethos* is going to be fundamentally problematic and in opposition to truth.

Satan as Itinerant Teacher

By clothing Satan in the robes of the Gorgianic orator, Milton reaches back into the past to posit a relationship between sophistry and demonic oratory. Contra Baumlin, who argues that Milton's Satan seduces but does not teach, I argue that Milton's critique of sophistry becomes even clearer if we consider that after her encounter with Satan, Eve learns to persuade. If we take Gorgias and the sophists truly as one of Milton's models for Satan, his aim is not only to persuade Eve but to teach her to be persuasive—to disseminate his art into the world and let chaos unfurl in the wake of unchecked rhetorical manipulation. After Book 9's temptation scene, Pallister suggests that Milton's Eve has "confirmed her predilection for satanic rhetoric" and begins to learn from Satan.¹¹⁹ Now that I have offered a sustained exploration of Satan's

¹¹⁹ Pallister, 218.

employment of *kairos* and the Gorgianic figures, I will argue that Eve has become Satan's student by mimicking his ornamented rhetorical displays. By having Eve learn Satan's persuasive techniques and then teach them to Adam, Milton offers his most sustained criticism of sophistry: Satan, rather than Gorgias, is the true progenitor of sophistic persuasion.

An important point of contention in Plato's *Gorgias* is that Socrates disparages Gorgias's rhetorical skill as a "knack," something with which one is born, rather than a skill that can be transferred, as Socrates says in Gorgias's eponymous dialogue.¹²⁰ George S. Kennedy notes that in the time of the peripatetic sophists, students were expected to learn by imitation, and in *Paradise Lost*, this is precisely what we see happen to Eve.¹²¹ When Satan "new parts put[s] on" and imitates the ancient orators of old, he provides a model for Eve to emulate, and though her inexperience has slighted her initially in terms of understanding rhetoric and discerning evil, after observing Satan's performance she becomes a prize pupil of his sophistic arts. Even before Eve bites into the fruit, she begins using Gorgianic figures in her speech. Her speech becomes cluttered with *anadiplosis* as she muses on "the Tree / of *Knowledge, knowledge*, both of good and evil" (PL 9.751-72, italics mine). Eve's questioning of God makes use of this repetition, as well: "In plain then what *forbids* He but to know, / *Forbids* us good, *forbids* us to be wise?" (PL 9.758-59). The balanced phrasing of *parisosis* begin to fill her speech: "He hath *eat 'n and lives / And knows, and speaks, and reasons and discerns*" (PL 9.764-65, italics mine). Eve's speeches here exhibit clever rhetorical flourishes similar to Satan's. Although Eve does not have an

¹²⁰ Plato, *Gorgias*, in *Gorgias, Menexenus, Protagoras*, 463b.

¹²¹ Kennedy, "Introduction," in Aristotle, *On Rhetoric*, ix.

outside audience to manipulate in this moment, she is her own audience, and through her rhetorical facility, she persuades herself to choose wrongly.

The full scope of Eve's rhetorical training becomes clear when she returns to Adam and begins to observe *kairos* and, like the serpent, "new parts put[s] on" as necessary. Her identity and appearance become contingent on her purpose. Before approaching him, Eve asks herself an important question: "But to Adam in what sort / Shall I appear? Shall I go to him to make known / As yet my change and give him to partake / Full happiness with me?" (PL 9.816-19). The way Eve talks about how she will appear to Adam—that she should be mindful of how her appearance will predispose him to her—echoes not only Satan's choice to appear as a serpent but also the way the serpent, with "new parts put on," imitates the grave ancient orators preparing to address the audience. Seeing Adam with flowers gathered into a wreath for her, Eve quickly begins to talk: "In her face excuse / Came prologue and apology too prompt" (PL 9.853-55). Like her tempter, Eve manages her appearance and has learned not only how to persuade but also how to act falsely—to construct a false face to approach Adam as the situation demands. Once she persuades Adam to eat the fruit, his rhetorical might and manner become like Eve's, exhibiting the figures for which Gorgias is famous.

Overcome with anguish following his persuasion, Adam unleashes the full might of his verbal dexterity, not only employing the figures alone but also combining them in elaborate and complex ways. He balances his phrases with sophisticated mixtures of *pariosis*, *parechresis*, and *anadiplosis*: "Bad fruit of knowledge if this be to know / Which leaves us naked thus, *of honor void, / Of innocence, of faith, of purity,* / Our wonted ornaments now *soiled and stained*" (PL 9.1073-75, italics mine). The phrase "of honor void, / Of innocence, of faith, of

purity” contains instances of *parisosis* in the balancing of the phrases (an “Of” followed by the quality that has been lost), and combined *anadiplosis* and *parechresis* in the alliteration on the word “of.” Not only is the phrase “soiled and stained” another instance of *parechresis*, but the repeated endings are also an example of *homoiooteleuton*. *Antithesis*, balanced phrasing joining two contrasting ideas, now works its way into Adam’s speech. He laments “good lost, and evil got!” (PL 9.1072). He mentions Satan as having been “true in our fall, / False in our promised rising” (PL 9.1069-70). The “truth” of Adam and Eve’s fall is juxtaposed against Satan’s promises that they would become as gods. In just a few lines, we have five instances of the figures, and many more occur within Adam’s speeches in this section.

However, anguish quickly gives way to anger as Adam and Eve turn against one another. Once they succumb to their anger, Eve’s tongue becomes the defense she lacked against Satan, and she deftly turns Adam’s arguments against him. She condemns him, arguing “[h]adst thou been there, / Or here th’attempt, thou couldst not have discerned, / Fraud in the serpent, speaking as he spake, / No ground of enmity between us known” (PL 9.1148-51). Eve strikes at Adam: “Being as I am, why didst not thou, the head, / Command me absolutely not to go, / Going into such danger as thou saidst?” (PL 9.1155-57). She offers the finishing blow with her last line: “Hadst thou been firm and fixed in thy dissent / Neither had I transgressed nor thou with me,” (PL 9.1160-61). I take this as a deft rhetorical move on Eve’s part. We know that she wanted choice, so she uses their opposites to condemn Adam for *not* constraining her. Without straying into that suggest Adam should have stopped her, what is far more interesting is the way Adam responds that he *had* admonished her not to go, but “Beyond this had been force, and force upon free will here hath no place” (PL 9.1173-74). Not only is Adam saying that had he

tried to do more, his action would have violated her free will, he has pinpointed the same problem—her desire for freedom, which Satan exploited to persuade her. In this case, Adam tosses it as a barb in their argument to sting her, but he has also drawn attention to what has happened to their language to get them to this point. Because the serpent could not physically harm them in the garden, the serpent had to go the only route it knew: to attack them through the flaw that Adam mentioned earlier in the poem; namely, the dangers accompany free will and choice. Although Satan cannot employ physical force, his rhetorical persuasions become as devastating as violence. Baumlin writes that Gorgianic rhetoric is “liberating, if deceptive,” as it enables the rhetorician to create contingent truths; in this case, the serpent’s “contingent truth” that they would not die (at least not immediately—in that regard, the serpent is correct) put Eve into the place of making a choice that has essentially been deceptively stripped of its stakes. Her choice, then, seems to have been no choice at all; Satan makes the option to eat the fruit seem the only viable decision.

While it might be tempting to suggest that Adam “wins” the argument at the end of the book by getting the last word, the actual consequence for their argument is that it continues on without reaching a conclusion. Having turned their Satanic—or, we might say, Gorgianic—rhetoric against one another in these final exchanges of the book, the full impact of Satan’s persuasion becomes clear. In the concluding lines of Book 9, the narrator tells the reader: “Thus they in mutual accusation spent / The fruitless hours, but neither self-condemning / And of their vain contest appeared no end” (*PL* 2. 1187-89). Their “mutual accusation” suggests the circularity of their plight; they, now suddenly educated in evil, are doomed to argue with one another forever. Because of the three books following Book 9, we know that they do not argue

“forever,” but the lines evoke a sense of meaningless, unending clamor. Their argumentation is “fruitless” because they cannot recognize their own culpability, and so they continually shift the responsibility to each other. If there is any winner or loser to arguments and debates that occur in Book 9, it is rhetoric and debate, which, by the book’s end, have been reduced to what Milton might have seen as the worst kind of sophistry. In the mouth of Milton’s Gorgianic Satan, words become a way to commit the violence that he could not commit physically. Although the end of *Paradise Lost* is hopeful, Book 9 leaves us in a place where truth has lost to sophistry and words have become weapons with which to commit harm. Argumentation in *Paradise Lost* is not the free and open debate Milton prizes in *Areopagitica* because the participants are not on equal footing in terms of their ability to discern evil. In Milton’s world, the fall is not only the fall of man but the fall of language’s transparency and truthfulness.

Conclusion

Just before Satan’s final persuasive speech to Eve, the Miltonic narrator says that in the ancient states of Athens and free Rome, eloquence once flourished; in a parenthetical aside, however, the narrator says that this eloquence has been “since mute” (*PL* 9.672). Because Milton conceives of eloquence as inseparable from truth, eloquence that has been muted would be the kind of false eloquence wielded, at least for Milton, by the Gorgianic sophists, as they are transmitted to the Renaissance by Plato. Casting Satan in the mode of the Gorgianic orator, then, and having language and argument collapse into an interminable circle by the poem’s end, Milton makes clear his critique of sophistic rhetoric and the power of words set to ill purposes. Not only does Gorgianic sophistry, as Milton might have understood it, unscrupulously prey

upon those unarmed to do combat, it is indifferent to the hearty love of truth that Milton understands as necessary for right persuasion.

Although Adam and Eve are unable to arm themselves with truth as their rhetorical *ethos* because that would require them to know evil and thus be fallen, which creates a narrative paradox, reading this book as a commentary on the sophistic arts suggests that had they been able to put on truth's armory, they would have been able to withstand Satan's deceptions. The only weapon to combat deceptive eloquence is eloquence in service of and empowered by truth. From Satan to Eve to Adam, Milton traces the gradual corrosion of the art of rhetoric when it is divorced from truth and conducted in the service of mere persuasion. Making Satan the original father of the sophistic arts becomes Milton's most damning critique of sophistry as he understood it; by aligning sophistry with the plan of the author of evil to bring about man's downfall, Milton suggests that rhetoric as practiced by the sophists, especially Gorgias, is ultimately antithetical to the truth *ethos* Milton models in *Areopagitica* because it strips the audience of the ability to choose and discern evil or to affirm truth. Whether Adam and Eve were made sufficient or not is beside the point; in Book 9, Satan takes the focus as he becomes a way for Milton to criticize the power of language unconstrained by truth.

The historical Gorgias, as cobbled together from extant fragments and accounts, was almost certainly not the intentional malefactor that Milton's Satan is. But what Milton would perceive in Gorgias that would make him a useful model for Satan would be the popular understanding that he considered truth, eloquence, and the verbal arts as ultimately ambiguous, powerful, and teachable. Milton conceives of sophistry as a force with the power to twist and tangle the mind of the ravished hearer, clouding the ability to choose wisely. Rhetoricians, both

ancient and early modern, recognized this in Gorgias, and though some embraced Gorgias's rhetoric as amoral eloquence, Milton pushes back against the tacit approval of speech acts' potential for good or evil, instead preferring to insist upon the good. Further, for Milton, it is the lack of stable truth in Gorgias's rhetorical appeals to *kairos* that makes his strategies so dangerous. Eve is easily persuaded because she cannot tell the difference between good and evil, and Satan is, as Baumlin notes, able to create his own contingent truths with which to deceive her.¹²² By doing so, Satan teaches Eve to persuade, reinforcing Milton's critique of sophistry: Satan's rhetorical persuasion is insidious merely because he misleads Adam and Eve, but he teaches them a way to speak that is totally divorced from the kind of truth Milton praises in *Areopagitica*. Satan's persuasion not only has disastrous implications for humanity, in particular, but devastating consequences for humanity's ability to communicate at all.

By presenting Satan as a Gorgianic rhetorician able to observe *kairos* and put it to his own disastrous uses, Milton has offered Satan as a figure who predates, in the popular imagination at least, even the earliest sophists. Rather than Milton's Satan borrowing from Gorgias, Gorgias has—since he first attempted an antithetical figure, employed alliteration, or observed *kairos*—always been borrowing from Satan. By aligning Satan, the father of lies, with Gorgias, the father of sophistry, Milton rewrites the received history of rhetoric and suggests that the sophistic tradition is of origin darker and older than the ancient.

¹²² Baumlin, "Ciceronian Decorum," 158.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have argued that Milton believes rhetoric requires truth to imbue it with eloquence. Because of the relationship between Milton's thought in his prose and his poetic works, pinning down what he is saying on a given subject can be a difficult task. However, if we try to isolate his claims about truth and oratory, we can see in *Paradise Lost* that Milton agonizes over these concerns. The way Milton casts truth in *Areopagitica* seems to suggest that even in 1644, he was concerned with how persuasive language can mask truth and was invested in finding ways to clearly speak about truth. As a polemicist, Milton was concerned about the uses to which language could be put.

What I hope to have made clear, then, is that Milton's truth *ethos* is not itself claiming to be the final word on truth, but rather, it is an *ideal* that, as Milton suggests through *Paradise Lost*, is needed to keep oratory from unchecked, duplicitous persuasion. The love of truth is, for Milton, a way of inoculating oneself against the sophistic impulse, but in *Paradise Lost*, truth seems to fail. The way Milton deals with these anxieties in *Paradise Lost* suggests that Milton is now not fully convinced of the truth for which he once argued so vigorously. Although at the beginning of this study, I was convinced that Milton's truth was unchanging throughout his career and that he simply modified the way he spoke about it over time, I now think that *Paradise Lost* represents a grimmer, more pragmatic vision of the relationship between truth and rhetoric dramatized through what would have been, for Milton, one of humanity's defining events. In *Areopagitica*, we see a younger, more optimistic Milton not yet sullied by the fall of

the Commonwealth, and his *Areopagitica* conveyed the voice of a man who still believed that truth would win out. By *Paradise Lost*, Milton had spent a career attempting to fend off those “Sophisms and Elenchs” that characterized much of the early modern understanding of rhetoric. Milton heightens the drama and intensifies the consequences of these concerns by presenting them through scenes of debate in *Paradise Lost*. In both the devils’ debate and Satan’s persuasion of Eve, we see language take on the sophistic ability to beguile its hearer and overcome by narrowing the terms of the argument to provide an easy solution. In Book 2, Satan constrains the argument to his desired end and the devils seek easy accord. In Book 9, Satan, acting as the Gorgianic sophist, constrains Eve’s choices while exploiting her desire to choose and then manages to infect humanity’s first parents from the beginning, rendering language ambiguous and problematic from shortly after its inception. Perhaps this is why Milton is so committed to ensuring that eloquence and truth are aligned. While I am not fully convinced that Milton’s dedication to truth changes between 1644 and 1667, there seems to be something in *Paradise Lost* that suggests that truth, when sought and applied by fallen creatures, has the potential to fail if it is not guided by an *ethos* that privileges all of the qualities that Milton associates with truth in *Areopagitica*. Unaided by the hearty love of truth, our debates, indeed all acts of persuasion, are, these works suggest, doomed to inefficacy and meaninglessness at best, and at worst, deceit and duplicity.

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