

THE VIRGIN IN THE GARDEN: MILTON'S OVIDIAN EVE

Milton's early partiality for Ovid once noted, it has been customary to assume that his formal apprenticeship to the Latin poet concluded with *Elegia septima*, the last poem in his small collection of Latin elegies. Elizabeth Sauer has referred to this gesture of formal leave-taking as the point at which Milton 'publicly divorced himself' from Ovid,¹ after which, it has often been argued, he left the service of his first master to follow the more congenial example of Vergil the epic poet. 'Ovid leads at the start, but Virgil wins': E. K. Rand's summary comment is representative of those who have charted this alleged shift in allegiance,² and reflects the way in which, until comparatively recently, Ovid's reputation had suffered through being set against the example of Vergil. Beside Vergil, the poet of public duty and the cost in human terms of Rome's enduring greatness, Ovid was felt to be lightweight and frivolous, and dismissed accordingly.³

However, the comprehensive work of a succession of able editors whose easy familiarity with classical poetry make them authoritative guides⁴ has confirmed the presence of frequent points of intersection between *Paradise Lost* and the *Metamorphoses* which Milton might have expected his 'fit audience' (VII. 31) to recognize. Moreover, the nature and extent of Milton's accommodation of distinctively Ovidian modes of narration in *Paradise Lost* received considerable critical attention in the 1980s,⁵ reflecting the recent revaluation of the *Meta-*

¹ 'Engendering Metamorphosis: Milton and the Ovidian Corpus', in *Ovid and the Renaissance Body*, ed. by Goran V. Stanivukovic (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), pp. 207–23 (p. 219).

² 'Milton in Rustication', *Studies in Philology*, 19 (1922), 109–35 (p. 135).

³ An evaluative judgement of this kind was anticipated by the Roman critic Quintilian, who reproached Ovid for having 'a lack of seriousness even when he writes epic' ('lascivus quidem in herois': *Institutio oratoria*, x. 1. 88, ed. by H. E. Butler, The Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1920; repr. 1963)).

⁴ From Patrick Hume, who produced the first full commentary on *Paradise Lost* (*The Poetical Works of John Milton* [. . .] *Together with Explanatory Notes on Each Book of the 'Paradise Lost'* by P.H. (London: Jacob Tonson, 1695)), through Bishop Thomas Newton and the Reverend Henry J. Todd, editors of the first and second Variorum editions respectively (*Paradise Lost* [. . .] *A New Edition. With Notes of Various Authors*, 2 vols (London: J. and R. Tonson and S. Draper, 1749); *Poetical Works of John Milton. With the Principal Notes of Various Commentators*, 6 vols (London: J. Johnson, 1801)), down to the fine editions of Milton's poetry from the last century, including those by Douglas Bush (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), John Carey and Alastair Fowler (London: Longman, 1971, rev. edn. 1998), and Roy Flanagan (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998), editors of the poetical works have had frequent occasion to cite Ovid and his works. (All quotations from Milton's poetry are taken from Carey and Fowler.)

⁵ See Louis Martz, *Poet of Exile: A Study of Milton's Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980). The invaluable contributions of Charles Martindale, *Milton and the Transformation of Ancient Epic* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), and, in particular, Richard DuRocher's full-length study, *Milton and Ovid* (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 1985), advanced the discussion of Milton's 'dialectical imitation' of Ovid, to borrow Thomas Greene's useful phrase. For an informed discussion of the differing types of imitation in the Renaissance, see Thomas

morphoses and the recovery of its relationship to the epic tradition.⁶ Ovid's substantial presence in *Paradise Lost* becomes less surprising in view of the testimony of Milton's youngest daughter Deborah. Dr Johnson reported that 'The books in which his daughter, who used to read to him, represented him as most delighting, after Homer, which he could almost repeat, were Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Euripides.'⁷ Dr Ward's interview with Deborah offers a slightly different version of her father's preferred reading, but the *Metamorphoses*, like Homer, remains a constant in both accounts:

Isaiah, Homer, and Ovid's Metamorphoses were books which they were often called to read to their father; and at my desire she repeated a considerable number of verses from the beginning of both these poets with great readiness. (Quoted in Johnson, ed. by Hill, Appendix O, 1, 199)

Criticism of the last decade or so has sought to demonstrate how, during the Renaissance, Ovid's diverse narratives of love and desire in the *Metamorphoses* came to be especially valued as material for the construction of early modern representations of subjectivity and as vehicles for conveying the complexities and ambiguities of sexuality, the psychology of desire, and the instability of gender roles.⁸ In this article I shall suggest how Milton's treatment of Eve can be fundamentally reinterpreted if we are attentive to its strong Ovidian cast. Milton appropriates narrative structures from the *Metamorphoses* both to amplify the elliptical account supplied in Genesis and to articulate Eve's developing experience, enabling an insight into her sense of self and sexuality. He extends and enriches his portrayal of Eve by presenting her through this strategy of deliberate allusion, endowing her with a mythic dimension that Adam almost entirely lacks.

As I examine Milton's complex blending of the Ovidian stories of Narcissus, Daphne, Flora, Proserpine, and Pomona, I hope to show how, through the controlled use of mythological patterning, Milton engages the reader in making complex responses to Eve. The mythological figurations that align Eve with myths from the *Metamorphoses* are not isolated, local effects but seem to be the result of a more significant level of association that demands interpretation and brings the reader into play. Too often the meaning of these mythological allusions has been determined in advance because of an overemphasis on their proleptic function.⁹ Milton deliberately fails to fix the meaning of such

Greene, *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), pp. 37–48.

⁶ See, for example, Brooks Otis, *Ovid as an Epic Poet*, rev. edn. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970).

⁷ Dr Johnson, *Lives of the Poets*, ed. by George Birkbeck Hill, 3 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1905), 1, 154.

⁸ See, for example, Linda Gregerson, 'Fault Lines: Milton's Mirror of Desire', in Gregerson, *The Reformation of the Subject: Spenser, Milton, and the English Protestant Epic*, Cambridge Studies in Renaissance Literature and Culture, 6 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 148–97; Lynn Enterline, *The Rhetoric of the Body from Ovid to Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); *Ovid and the Renaissance Body*, ed. by Stanivukovic.

⁹ See, for example, William Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1935), pp. 172–79; Davis P. Harding, *The Club of Hercules: Studies in the Classical Background of 'Paradise Lost'*, Illinois Studies in Language and Literature (Urbana: University of Illinois Press,

allusions that thereby become a way of holding in solution unresolved, even contradictory, emphases in a situation where alternatives are not yet exclusive.

Milton deftly manipulates the motif of Eve's virginity, interweaving a number of different mythological strands to create a richly braided effect that intensifies his thematic design. Before venturing into less familiar territory, I shall begin on solid and familiar ground by looking at how he uses the tale of Narcissus as a template to shape the autobiographical episode in which Eve recounts her first memories and the events immediately succeeding her creation, as this is generally acknowledged to be one of the most unequivocal examples of a specifically Ovidian episode in the poem.¹⁰ Over the past decade, a number of critics have used categories drawn from the influential writings of Lacan¹¹ to structure their discussion of Eve's 'mirror stage';¹² my particular purpose is not so much to debate whether or not the imposition of a Lacanian perspective is illuminating, but to demonstrate that Milton's representation of Eve's experience here is indisputably Ovidian.

First it is important to reflect on the significance of some of Milton's interpretative choices here, as well as to remind ourselves of how little Milton had to work with at this point, by looking at the relevant passage from the second chapter of Genesis. Observing that it was 'not good that the man should be alone' (Gen. 2. 18), the Lord God

caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the Flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from Man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This *is* now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. (Gen. 2. 21–23)

The biblical account of the creation of 'Woman' is teasingly elliptical, leaving much unsaid. Only certain decisive moments are recorded: thoughts and feelings remain unexpressed and invite interpretation. Nevertheless, the vantage-point from which we, as readers, are encouraged to observe what takes place is evidently and unsurprisingly a male viewpoint. Indeed, we may be so accustomed to the passage as it stands that we may not even stop to consider certain fundamental questions that the narrative fails to answer. *Where* was Eve removed to immediately after her creation from Adam, and *why*? What did she

1962), pp. 67–85; A. Bartlett Giamatti, *The Earthly Paradise and the Renaissance Epic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), pp. 295–355. However, in her fine scholarly defence of *Milton's Eve* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983), Diane McColley has attempted to free Eve altogether from such compromising insinuations before the Fall.

¹⁰ As Anderson observes in his commentary: 'We possess no other extended narration about Narcissus, and, although some people argue that much of Ovid's achievement should be credited to a lost Hellenistic source, there is no evidence whatsoever for such material' (*Ovid's Metamorphoses*, Books 1–5, ed. by William S. Anderson (London: University of Oklahoma Press), p. 372).

¹¹ See Jacques Lacan, 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the "I" as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience', in *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977), pp. 1–7.

¹² Most notably: Claudia M. Champagne, 'Adam and his "Other Self" in *Paradise Lost*: A Lacanian Study in Psychic Development', *Milton Quarterly*, 25 (1991), 48–59; James Earl, 'Eve's Narcissism', *Milton Quarterly*, 19 (1985), 13–16; Gregerson, *The Reformation of the Subject*, pp. 158–60; R. C. Martin, 'How Came I Thus? Adam and Eve in the Mirror of the Other', *College Literature*, 27.2 (2000), 57–79.

do before her Creator led her back to Adam? What was *her* response to Adam's proprietorial declaration 'This is now bone of my bones'?

There are obvious iconographic parallels between the creation of Eve from Adam's living bone and Pygmalion's ivory maid who softens into flesh and comes to life a fully formed woman, awakened like Sleeping Beauty with a lover's kiss. The answer to Pygmalion's prayer, she seems the ideal woman and perfect wife, at once compliantly submissive and alluringly erotic: a fantasy figure with an enduring appeal—the Stepford wives seem cast from the same mould—whose whole world is her husband. Without a name and without a voice, the former statue may seem as much Pygmalion's possession as the piece of ivory from which she was originally fashioned.

However, the text in the *Metamorphoses* does not simply enact the transformation of cold, hard ivory to warm, soft flesh; her successful metamorphosis from lifeless statue to living woman is signalled in the text by the crucial word *sensit* ('she felt', *Met.* x. 293),¹³ which indicates a significant shift in focus from the sensations experienced by Pygmalion to the responses of his newly awakened bride. When she finally opens her eyes and timidly looks up, *pariter cum caelo vidit amantem* ('together with the sky she saw her lover', x. 294).¹⁴ In that moment, she is promoted from lifelike, but lifeless, aesthetic object to human being, observing the world from her own genuine position as subject. Although he does not pursue this line of thought himself, Ovid thereby opens up for imaginative speculation such intriguing questions as: how would it feel to be brought into the world fully grown, without any experience of life, and to find oneself at once the object of another's passion?

By imaginatively reconstructing Eve's first moments of life and her initial response to Adam from Eve's own viewpoint, Milton embraced this challenge and at the same time undertook to answer the questions posed by the biblical account of the creation of Eve, exploiting the interpretative possibilities embedded in Genesis to enrich his own narrative. If, after her creation from his rib, she was brought to Adam, then this would seem to suggest a short period of separation while he continued in the deep sleep into which he had fallen. Having Eve wake to life entirely alone allows her to experience a sense of self separate from her relationship to Adam, and thereby encourages the reader to see her as a fully integrated human being, and not simply to view her in terms of Adam's response to her. The significance of this narrative decision is difficult to exaggerate.

By allowing Eve to recount her earliest experiences of life, Milton offers his readers an unfamiliar perspective on these familiar events: we first hear about them focalized through Eve herself, telling her own story from her own point of view. In Genesis, the question of whether or not she will be willing to fulfil the

¹³ Text with translation based on that of F. J. Miller in the Loeb Classical Library, rev. edn by G. P. Goold, 2 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977). Throughout, *Met.* = Ovid, *Metamorphoses*.

¹⁴ For a persuasive discussion of the way in which 'The look that the statue-turned-woman offers back to her creator [. . .] represents the defining point of her vivification', see Genevieve Liveley, 'Reading Resistance in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*', in *Ovidian Transformations: Essays on the 'Metamorphoses' and its Reception*, ed. by Philip Hardie, Alessandro Barchiesi, and Stephen Hinds (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 197–213 (p. 207).

role for which she has been created as a 'help meet' to delight Adam simply does not arise; incompatibility of feeling is not even acknowledged as a possibility. In *Paradise Lost*, however, we do not find a generic type, 'Woman' with a capital letter, but rather, as the use of Eve's personal name throughout implies, an autonomous individual whose acceptance of Adam cannot, unlike the consent of Pygmalion's bride, be unquestioningly assumed.

The passage in which Eve describes her first moments of consciousness merits an extended consideration and is worth including in full:

That day I oft remember, when from sleep
I first awaked, and found myself reposed
Under a shade of flowers, much wondering where
And what I was, whence thither brought and how.
Not distant far from thence a murmuring sound
Of waters issued from a cave, and spread
Into a liquid plain, then stood unmoved,
Pure as the expanse of heaven; I thither went
With unexperienced thought, and laid me down
On the green bank, to look into the clear
Smooth lake, that seemed to me another sky.
As I bent down to look, just opposite
A shape within the watery gleam appeared,
Bending to look on me: I started back,
It started back; but pleased I soon returned,
Pleased it returned as soon with answering looks
Of sympathy and love: there I had fixed
Mine eyes till now, and pined with vain desire,
Had not a voice thus warned me, What thou seest,
What there thou seest, fair creature, is thyself;
With thee it came and goes: but follow me,
And I will bring thee where no shadow stays
Thy coming, and thy soft embraces; he
Whose image thou art, him thou shalt enjoy
Inseparably thine, to him shalt bear
Multitudes like thyself, and thence be called
Mother of human race.

(iv. 449–75)

Although no explicit comparison is drawn between the two, readers from the earliest editors onwards have recognized the obvious and open application to Eve's first memories of Ovid's Narcissus and his love for his own reflection in the water. The myth is clearly instrumental in articulating the experience—unique to Adam and Eve as the first human beings, and Pygmalion's bride too, of course—of coming to consciousness as fully formed adults, and encountering the world with 'unexperienced thought' (iv. 457). Indeed, Milton's creative adaptation was immediately acclaimed as improving upon the original: Patrick Hume was one of the first to defend Milton's usage on the grounds that it was 'much more probable that a Person who had never seen any thing like her self, should be in love with her own faint reflected Resemblance, than that a Man acquainted with the World and himself, should be undone by so dull a dotage' (note to iv. 461).

The selective interplay between the story remembered from Ovid and the

present text is at its most brilliant as both gaze at their reflections in the pool. Narcissus's peculiar status of being at once lover and beloved, subject and object of desire, and the blurring of such distinctions are reinforced by a dazzling sequence of mirroring effects in the hemistichs of these lines and by the way in which, as DuRocher has pointed out, 'All the verbs, active and passive, return to "*ipse*" (himself)' (pp. 90–91):

cunctaque miratur, quibus est mirabilis ipse:
se cupit imprudens et, qui probat, ipse probatur,
dumque petit, petitur, pariterque accendit et ardet.
(*Met.* III. 424–26)

All things, in short, he admires for which he is himself admired. Unwittingly he desires himself; he praises, and is himself what he praises; and while he seeks, is sought; equally he kindles and burns with desire.

Eve's attraction to the responsiveness of her reflected image, the '*answering* looks | Of sympathy and love' (emphasis added), is suggested syntactically by the mirroring of subject and image along the line of symmetry at the end of two successive verses: 'I started back, | It started back', and 'pleased I soon returned, | Pleased it returned as soon' (iv. 462–64). In accordance with the purpose for which she has been created, Eve reveals here her nature to give sympathy and love, but ironically, because she has been removed from Adam's side, such feelings have become deflected away from him.

The inability of Narcissus to go beyond himself is emphatically established in Ovid's account: he scorns male and female admirers alike; then suffers his strange fate in retributive justice as a punishment for his unyielding pride. The scene is carefully set by Ovid in a beautifully pointed, ecphrastic set piece:

fons erat inlimis, nitidis argenteus undis,
quem neque pastores neque pastae monte capellae
contigerant aliudve pecus, quem nulla volucris
nec fera turbarat nec lapsus ab arbore ramus;
(*Met.* III. 407–10)

There was a clear pool with silvery bright water, to which no shepherds ever came, or she-goats feeding on the mountain-side, or any other cattle; whose smooth surface neither bird nor beast nor falling bough ever ruffled.

The *locus amoenus*, the pleasant place—conventionally the setting for lovers' embraces—is, as E. R. Curtius noted in his classic discussion of this narrative topos,¹⁵ characteristically 'a beautiful, shaded natural site', but it is only deceptively attractive here. Hemmed about by trees so that the sun barely penetrates, the pool develops an atmosphere of lifelessness and sterility. Except for the silvery brightness of the water, the entire passage is couched in negatives. Although, on one level, the heavy emphasis on the way that no living being or inanimate object has ever disturbed the pool is necessary to convey the exceptional reflective properties of the water, on another it suggests how the pool is like Narcissus himself: it has never been touched. The remote, secluded place that benefits neither man nor beast becomes emblematic of the negative quality

¹⁵ E. R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. by W. R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), p. 195.

of Narcissus's own beautiful self-sufficiency. The scene that Eve invites us to view is significantly different: the water spreads out into a broad expanse or 'liquid plain' (iv. 455) rather than remaining contained in a pool or pond. This open prospect adumbrates the way that Eve herself will not ultimately remain self-enclosed (DuRocher, pp. 96–97).

Indeed, it cannot altogether be denied that the point of the association between Narcissus and Eve is the contrast rather than the comparison of the final outcome in each case since Eve, unlike Narcissus, will apparently find fulfilment and love. Eve's divine guide offers her an alternative that Narcissus had already rejected. In place of a doomed and frustrated love, a life of barren self-absorption, he promises her the means to satisfy her desires with substantial embraces, and indeed, her reminiscences to Adam conclude with the first couple 'Imparadised in one another's arms' (iv. 506).

It has often been argued that the function of Eve's separation from Adam in Milton's narrative had been to ensure that their marriage is seen to be the result of her own free choice and deliberate commitment to heterosexual love as well as satisfying the lonely Adam's desire for a companion. Commenting on this 'happy ending', Mary Nyquist concludes: 'Grounded in illusion, Eve's desire for another self is therefore thoroughly appropriated by the patriarchal order, with the result that in *Paradise Lost*'s recasting of Ovid's tale of Narcissus, Eve's illusion is not only permitted but destined to pass away.'¹⁶ However, this movement from illusion to reality is not as straightforward as these remarks would seem to suggest. Eve recalls to Adam how she felt compelled to follow the lead of her invisible guide:

Till I espied thee, fair indeed and tall,
Under a platan, yet methought, less fair,
Less winning soft, less amiably mild,
Than that smooth watery image; back I turned.
(iv. 477–80)

On first encountering Adam, Eve deliberately turns back to the illusory self-image in the water that she now knows to be herself, just as Narcissus had done: *ad faciem rediit male sanus eandem* ('half distraught, he turned again to the same image' (*Met.* III. 474)), even after his climactic realization that the face he saw there was his own:

'iste ego sum! sensi; nec me mea fallit imago.'
(*Met.* III. 463)
'Oh I am he!' I have felt it, I know now my own image.'

Eve silently rejects Adam after judging him wanting, '*less fair, | Less winning soft, less amiably mild*' (iv. 478–79, emphases added) than the soft feminine image in the water. As Eve appraises Adam's firm contours and muscular form, so unlike the inviting softness of the image in the lake, it is difference that she registers, and she turns from him. Eve may be Adam's 'heart's desire' (VIII.

¹⁶ 'The Genesis of Gendered Subjectivity in the Divorce Tracts and *Paradise Lost*', in *Remembering Milton: Essays on the Texts and Traditions*, ed. by Mary Nyquist and Margaret Ferguson (New York and London: Methuen, 1987), pp. 99–127 (p. 122).

451), but he does not, at least according to first impressions, seem to have been hers.

Readers have so long been familiar with the proleptic reading in which either Eve's error in believing her reflection to be another person 'foreshadows her later credulity'¹⁷—or else, more frequently, her admiration for her own reflection betrays a 'faint trace of latent vanity and self-centredness'¹⁸ later to be exploited by Satan—that other possibilities are thereby excluded. The extension of the comparison here, as Eve turns away from Adam and turns back to the pool, encourages the reader to associate her with Narcissus as the archetypal symbol of destructive self-love, who lived a sterile life and involved Echo in his own ruin.

Paradise Lost in its larger movement is inevitably a narrative of the expected, but there are smaller cross-currents of the unexpected to be found. S. A. Demetrakopoulos's remark that 'Eve is never pictured as anything other than rather obligingly accepting Adam's advances'¹⁹ conveniently skips over Eve's own account of her initial rejection of Adam's approaches, just as Adam himself offers a significantly edited version of their first meeting to Raphael, in which any memory of her active resistance or any possibility of a conflict of wills has, with some difficulty, been suppressed (VIII. 500–10). Demetrakopoulos's comment provides an accurate image of Sin's sexually compliant response to Satan (II. 765–67), but as a summary of Eve's more complex relationship with Adam it is evidently an oversimplification. The chronological priority given to Eve's account of their first encounter is significant: not only does it give narrative weight and emphasis to Eve's own experience, but, by allowing Eve to speak first, her version of events is not made to seem merely a faint or distorted echo of Adam's.

As Eve deliberately turns from Adam back to the image of herself in the lake, Milton forces a revision in the reader's expectations: we do not find the idyllic harmony of wills that one would have thought must monotonously define paradisiacal relationships. The narrative falters on the brink of crisis as Adam is manoeuvred into the position of Echo, unable to offer a powerful enough alternative to distract Narcissus from the attractions of his lovely image. Ironically, of course, Adam was not made to be an echo of Eve; on the contrary, Eve was created to be the image of Adam. The sense of dislocation, while significant in itself, is only momentary, however, as Adam swiftly asserts himself and throws off the passive role of Echo that has been temporarily foisted upon

¹⁷ Maurice Kelley, *This Great Argument: A Study of Milton's 'De Doctrina Christiana' as a Gloss on 'Paradise Lost'* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), p. 150; a more recent example of this line of argument is to be found in King-Kok Cheung's essay 'Beauty and the Beast: A Sinuous Reflection of Milton's Eve', *Milton Studies*, 23 (1990), 197–214 (p. 202).

¹⁸ Douglas Bush, 'Ironical and Ambiguous Allusion in *Paradise Lost*', *Journal of English and German Philology*, 60 (1961), 631–40 (p. 638). More recently, Beverly McCabe concluded: 'Eve's vanity is not a compatible behaviour with the prelapsarian world' ('Eve: Victim, Villain or Vehicle? The Forewarnings and Prefiguration of the Fall in *Paradise Lost*', *CLA Journal*, 43 (1999), 73–88 (p. 73)). Such a position is reminiscent of E. M. W. Tillyard's claim that Adam and Eve were 'virtually fallen before the official temptation has begun' (*Studies in Milton* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1951), p. 13).

¹⁹ 'Eve as a Courtly and Circean Fatal Woman', *Milton Quarterly*, 9 (1975), 96–106 (p. 102).

him. The scene of Narcissus gazing enamoured at his own reflection is almost imperceptibly transformed into one of Apollo's ardent pursuit of Daphne.

As Eve records her first sight of Adam, the mythological configuration in play shifts from a static tableau of Narcissus gazing at his reflection to a scene of flight and pursuit so familiar from the first book of the *Metamorphoses*.²⁰ Milton displays his assimilative genius to advantage here in the way he combines and co-ordinates different types of action into an evolving narrative sequence. By yoking discrete episodes from Ovidian myth into fruitful collaboration, he stirs the dry bones of Genesis to strangely independent life and meaning, and offers complex emotional insights into the differing trajectories traced by the onset of erotic desire in the first man and woman. Milton's evocation of the Ovidian story of Daphne's flight from Apollo,²¹ unlike his use of Ovid's version of the Narcissus myth, has been generally overlooked, however.²² Compared with the scene by the lake, the linkage is understated, but although the most audible echoes are only fleeting, once recognized, the myth of Apollo's pursuit of Daphne seems to have a considerable bearing both on the present situation and on future developments in the narrative.

The natural corollary of linking Apollo with Adam is of course a pairing together of Eve and Daphne,²³ especially since Adam is never given a mythological role independently of Eve. The association is prompted by the scene Milton encourages the reader to visualize as Eve describes how she turned her back on Adam and fled back towards the lake, while he gave chase shouting after her: 'Return fair Eve, | Whom fly'st thou? Whom thou fly'st, of him thou art' (iv. 481–82). The stage directions embedded here make it plain that Adam is not simply calling out after Eve, but is pursuing her as she runs away from him. Moreover, Adam's urgent plea with its emphatic reiteration of 'fly'st' audibly echoes the stressed repetition of *fugere* in Apollo's desperate appeal to Daphne: *nescis, temeraria, nescis, | quem fugias, ideoque fugis* ('You do not know, rash one, you know not who it is you fly, and for that reason you fly him' (*Met.* i. 514–15)).

Eve's narrative at this point thus poses something of a dilemma for the reader: does it show her willing compliance or rather Adam's forceful reappropriation of her? Our sense of difficulty is increased by the way in which the actual moment of decision is glossed over by Eve's evasive form of words. Was Eve following the line of least resistance when she 'yielded' (iv. 489) to Adam, or was she too finally pierced by Love's golden arrow (*Met.* i. 470), as Milton later implies in the panegyric to 'wedded love' (iv. 763)? Many years ago Cleanth Brooks remarked that Eve's account seemed to anticipate Freud's observations

²⁰ Three such examples follow in rapid succession: Daphne's flight from Apollo (*Met.* i. 402–52), which takes significance from being the *primus amor* not only of the god but also of the epic as a whole; Io's unsuccessful attempt to outstrip Jupiter (*Met.* i. 588–600); and the more cursory account of Syrinx's transformation into marsh reeds to elude her pursuer, Pan (*Met.* i. 698–714).

²¹ See Anderson's commentary, in which he maintains that this highly crafted episode is 'essentially Ovid's free invention' (p. 190).

²² Bush noted the allusion, but merely observed that Adam's words at iv. 481–82, which 'apparently echo those of the amorous Apollo to the fleeing Daphne [. . .] suggest the germ of his excessive devotion to [Eve]' (p. 286).

²³ In 'Daphne in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century English Poetry', *MLR*, 66 (1971), 251–63, Christine Rees found 'an oblique reminder' of Daphne's fate in iv. 72–73 (p. 252).

on the comparative difficulty the female may experience in the transition to adult heterosexuality,²⁴ and it is not surprising to find that Freudian psychologists too have interpreted Daphne's flight as 'symbolizing a girl's instinctive horror of the sex act'.²⁵ C. S. Lewis has encouraged the reader to imagine Eve 'blushing like the morn' when Adam first led her 'to the nuptial bower' (VIII. 510–11) because of her 'self-consciousness' at being so highly 'valued'.²⁶ Yet, another construction could be placed upon her blushes. It seems at least worth noting how Daphne, who sought to enjoy *perpetua virginitas* (*Met.* I. 486–87), responded when 'nuptial sanctity and marriage rites' (VIII. 487) were mentioned in her presence. Daphne's response was extreme, of course, loathing the idea of marriage as if it were a thing of evil: 'she would blush rosy red over her fair face' (*pulchra verecundo suffuderat ora rubore* (*Met.* I. 484)).

This is not an isolated difficulty. A similar, unresolved tension underlies our first introduction to Adam and Eve. A number of critics have commented that the description of Eve's hair becomes suggestive of their sexual relationship. Indeed, on the strength of this passage Michael Lieb has gone so far as to conclude that in Milton's eyes 'Eve must be sexually dominated by a superior force and thus yield herself as the hair would yield itself to higher rule'.²⁷ Both Eve and Daphne wear their hair 'unadorned/*inornatos* (IV. 305; *Met.* I. 497), but whereas Daphne's hair becomes emblematic of her freedom from masculine control, growing *sine lege* (lit. 'without law', *Met.* I. 477), the 'dishevelled' (IV. 306) state of Eve's tresses

implied
Subjection, but required with gentle sway,
And by her yielded, by him best received,
Yielded with coy submission, modest pride,
And sweet reluctant amorous delay.

(IV. 307–11)

The use of 'imply' seems of particular significance here. While Adam's body is a text that offers its meaning openly and unequivocally—'His fair large front and eye sublime declared | Absolute rule' (IV. 300–01)—the text offered by Eve's body requires an attentive reading to unfold its significance. The style of the passage embodies this difficulty in the way its shifting syntax resists final interpretation. The passage is unusually rich in oxymoron. Indeed, as Todd H. Sammons remarked, Eve is 'not just coy ("holding back"), nor just submissive ("giving in"), but coyly submissive—modestly proud and reluctantly amorous as well'.²⁸ The final line is particularly challenging with its exquisitely fluid and complex oxymoron, 'sweet reluctant amorous delay'. The line is a close

²⁴ 'Eve's Awakening', in *Essays in Honor of Walter Clyde Curry* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 1954), 183–97, repr. in *Milton: Modern Judgements*, ed. by Alan Rudrum (London: Aurora, 1969), pp. 183–97 (p. 176).

²⁵ See Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths*, rev. edn, 2 vols (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), I, 17.

²⁶ But Lewis has some reservations too: see 'Unfallen Sexuality', in *A Preface to 'Paradise Lost'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1942; repr. 1971), pp. 122–24 (p. 123).

²⁷ *The Dialectics of Creation: Patterns of Birth and Regeneration in 'Paradise Lost'* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1970), p. 72.

²⁸ 'As the Vine Curls her Tendrils': Marriage Topos and Erotic Countertopos in *Paradise Lost*, *Milton Quarterly*, 20 (1986), 117–27 (p. 119).

translation of the second line of a couplet from the *Ars amatoria*, in which Ovid, in his role as *magister amoris*, extols the benefits of prolonged foreplay as a reliable method of achieving simultaneous orgasm:

Crede mihi, non est veneris properanda voluptas,
Sed sensim tarda prolicienda mora.
(*Ars amatoria*, II. 717–18)

Believe me, love's pleasure must not be hastened,
but gradually drawn out by slow delay.

Kerrigan and Braden have commended the combination of modifying adjectives in Milton's line, which charge "delay" with considerable libidinal power. Reluctant to be amorous? Reluctant to delay? In either case it is sweet.²⁹ Other readers have found Milton's line more troubling. Their unease seems to stem directly from Milton's use of 'reluctant', which, interestingly, has no equivalent in the Ovidian original. In his note to IV. 310, Patrick Hume was the first editor to direct the reader's attention to the derivation of the word in his note to the line—'*Reluctant*, of *Reluctans*, Lat. struggling, of *Reluctari*, Lat. to strive'—but made no further comment. More recently Le Comte made explicit what Hume's note left implicit: 'Milton's "reluctant" has the etymological indication of a certain amount of struggling, reinforcing the gradualness of "Yielded with coy submission".'³⁰ As so often in the poem, the etymological force of a word may be felt to contribute to a passage's possible significance. Here the literal Latin meaning of *reluctari* may bring an otherwise submerged and ill-defined feeling of uneasiness nearer to the surface.

This impression may be reinforced by powerful intratextual parallelism. Such a scene of flight and pursuit as Eve describes here is familiar not only from the *Metamorphoses*, but also from Sin's own account of her encounter with Death:

I fled, but he pursued (though more, it seems
Inflamed with lust than rage) and swifter far,
Me overtook his mother all dismayed,
And in embraces forcible and foul
Ingendering with me, of that rape begot
These yelling monsters [. . .]

(II. 790–95)

Sin could be said to play out the tensions discernible here between Adam and Eve in a grotesquely exaggerated and extreme form, where female freedom of choice has been entirely eroded by male compulsion. By revisiting Sin's experiences at this point the reader is reassured of the contrasting outcome to Eve's experience while leaving certain tensions unresolved between the human couple.

Although her maker guides Eve to Adam, marriage, and motherhood as her best option, the decision to reject or accept Adam is hers to make now. The burden of responsibility for her own life and the future of Adam and the

²⁹ William Kerrigan and Gordon Braden, 'Milton's Coy Eve: *Paradise Lost* and Renaissance Love Poetry', *English Literary History*, 53 (1986), 27–51 (pp. 41–42).

³⁰ Edward Le Comte, *Milton and Sex* (London: Macmillan, 1978), p. 91.

human race ultimately devolves upon her shoulders. This is not a tangential complexity: it coheres not only with Narcissus's rejection of all other claims on him but that of self, but also with Daphne's disengagement from society, her insistent rejection of the expected role of wife and mother, and her denial of her father's repeated claim that she *owed* him a son-in-law and grandchildren:

nec, quid Hymen, quid Amor, quid sint conubia curat.
saepe pater dixit 'generum mihi, filia, debes'
saepe pater dixit 'debes mihi, nata, nepotes'.
(*Met.* I. 481–82)

Nor cared she at all what Hymen, love, or marriage might be. Often her father said: 'Daughter, you owe me a son-in-law'; and often 'Daughter you owe me grandsons'.

In God's speech to the virgin Eve he delicately pronounces her sexual maturity and readiness for her future roles as bride and mother, according equal emphasis to each: to the satisfaction of her yearning for love, and to her elevation to a more exalted position as 'Mother of human race' (iv. 472–75). Yet after God has led her from maidenhood to wedlock, Eve turns away from Adam and seeks to return to her prior condition and retain her virgin state. While Eve attempts to exclude Adam from her world, clinging to her individuality and singleness, there exists a great tension between her life-giving and life-denying potential. Daphne had craved perpetual virginity as a boon from her father, but when her outstanding beauty threatened her maidenhood, her father was obliged to transform her. The laurel's beauty may be 'ever green' but it is barren. Apollo's love for his emblem, the laurel, is *sterilem* [. . .] *amorem*, a 'fruitless love' (*Met.* I. 496), when compared with the promise of fruitfulness that was implicit in the nymph's beauty and the consummation of desire. When Eve finally succumbs to Adam, Milton celebrates the supremacy of the dynamic power of love over a passive, enclosed symbol of chastity. Whereas Daphne's fine but frigid beauty had inspired Apollo with a passion she could not reciprocate, Eve, apparently transfixed by Love's golden shaft, is finally led from virginal seclusion to the bower of wedded bliss.

Just as the story of Narcissus and his reflection blended into the story of Daphne's flight from Apollo, the stories of Daphne and Flora now dovetail to give additional narrative coherence to Milton's amplification of Genesis. The stories of Daphne and Flora prove surprisingly complementary: both myths are tales of pursuit and metamorphosis, though the emphasis accorded to these common elements differs significantly in each case. Apollo's pursuit and Daphne's flight are central to her story and are thus narrated at length by Ovid. While Flora's account includes mention of her flight from the pursuing Zephyr, it is clearly peripheral to the dominant motifs of her story—desire resolved in married love, fulfilment, and fruitfulness—and is accordingly passed over in a perfunctory manner. In Flora's case the metamorphosis does not involve a change of shape, but is rather a refining process: she evolves from virgin to bride, from nymph to goddess, whereas Daphne retains her virgin state but in direct consequence loses her humanity. Daphne's metamorphosis curtails her personal history; Flora's opens up new possibilities, and a role of expanded meaning and significance. Flora's story can thus be said to take over where

Daphne's left off: the latter's situation is summarily restated, her story resumed and developed further.

The story of the west wind's ardent pursuit of the earth nymph Chloris, their marriage, and her subsequent elevation to the rank of goddess as *mater florum* ('mother of flowers', *Fasti*, v. 183)³¹ is related by Ovid alone of the Roman poets. In an interview given by the goddess, the story of her transformation develops from a playful piece of etymology in which Flora supposes that her Roman name is a corruption of its Greek form: *Chloris eram quae Flora vocor* ('I was Chloris who am now called Flora' (*Fasti*, v. 195)). But Ovid also suggests that the myth has an aetiological significance as the 'before' and 'after' phases of a metamorphosis which explains the transformation of the bare earth after it has been warmed by the spring breeze. Ovid implies that the change involved a more profound metamorphosis both in the earth and in Chloris herself. Until Chloris became Flora through her fruitful union with Zephyr, the earth had been of one colour, *unius tellus ante coloris erat* (*Fasti*, v. 221–22). Flora herself acknowledges the change and draws a distinction between her present status as goddess of flowers and her former condition as a nymph of the fields (*Chloris eram, nymphe campi felicitis* (*Fasti*, v. 197)), symbolized in the covering of her implied nakedness (*quae fuerit mihi forma, grave est narrare modestae* (*Fasti* v. 199)) with a colourful robe richly embroidered with flowers (*sic haec est cultu versicolore decens* (*Fasti*, v. 356)) that mirrors the changes in the bare earth at springtime from the first green shoots to the variety of spring flowers (*Fasti*, v. 358). It is moreover a thematic progression that is clearly restated in Raphael's account of the earth's evolution in the process of creation, envisaged as the clothing of a naked woman. After the Son's fructifying word,

[. . .] the bare earth, till then
Desert and bare, unsightly, unadorned,
Brought forth the tender grass, whose verdure clad
Her universal face with pleasant green;
Then herbs of every leaf, that sudden flowered,
Opening their various colours, and made gay
Her bosom smelling sweet [. . .]

[. . .] earth in her rich attire
Consummate lovely smiled.

(VII. 313–19; 501–02)

Unlike the fleeting comparison of Eve with Pales (ix. 393), the rural goddess and patroness of shepherds (*Fasti*, iv. 744, 776), the impression of Flora as a mythic analogue to Eve persists and is sustained by a number of peculiarly apt and suggestive correspondences.³² Just as Zephyr endowed Flora with her especial role as guardian of flowers as her wedding gift (*Fasti*, v. 211–12), Eve assumes special responsibility for the flowers of Eden: the 'flowers | Embordered

³¹ Text and translation by Sir James G. Frazer in the Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1931).

³² In *Milton's Pastoral Vision: An Approach to 'Paradise Lost'* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1971), John R. Knott suggestively noted that 'Eve most nearly fills the role of Flora' (p. 115).

on each bank' disclose 'the hand of Eve' (ix. 437–38). Flora describes her happy position thus:

vere fruor semper: semper nitidissimus annus,
arbor habet frondes, pabula semper humus.
Est mihi fecundus dotalibus hortus in agris:
aura foveat, liquidae fonte rigatur aquae.
(*Fasti*, v. 207–10)

I enjoy perpetual spring; most blooming is the year ever; ever the tree is clothed with leaves, the ground with pasture. In the fields that are my dower, I have a fruitful garden, fanned by the breeze and watered by a spring of running water.

Eve is similarly pictured in a magical garden against a backcloth of 'eternal spring' (iv. 268) where 'Rose a fresh fountain' that watered the plants 'with many a rill' (iv. 229–30). Here too the fairness of spring and the fruitfulness of autumn are found together: 'spring and autumn here | Danced hand in hand' (v. 394–95).

Eve's alignment with Flora relates pointedly to her present and future roles, defining their positive aspects. Most obviously, it highlights Eve's present capacity as happy young bride and her tutelage of flowers. Moreover, the constant and loving attention she devotes to the young charges that as yet fill 'Her nursery' (viii. 46) gives ample evidence of her fitness as the designated mother of mankind. Marshall Grossman has argued for the significance of the way 'Eve's promised empowerment as "mother of human race" is deferred beyond the bounds of the poem',³³ but I would prefer to emphasize the way that Eve's mothering of the flowers—that have been significantly reserved for her to name (xi. 273–79)—doubles both to suggest and to anticipate her importance as the 'Mother of all Mankind, | Mother of all things living' (xi. 159–60) by stressing the virtuality of her motherhood. Eve the bride is framed not only by her past as the chaste reluctant virgin but also by her future as the prospective mother of mankind.

Eve combines the roles of virgin and bride with daring simultaneity of effect as Milton continues to associate her with virginal figures even after her marriage to Adam, when she is no longer apparently³⁴ a virgin.³⁵ Indeed, as Eve parts from Adam to garden alone on the morning of the Fall, her virgin state is reiterated with ominous suggestiveness. Eve's virginity, whether merely

³³ Julia M. Walker, 'The Idea of Milton and the Idea of Woman', in *Milton and the Idea of Woman*, ed. by Walker (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp. 1–15 (p. 8); Walker is commenting on Grossman's line of argument in 'Servile/Sterile/Style: Milton and the Question of Woman', pp. 148–68 of the same volume.

³⁴ In spite of the strong impression that Adam and Eve are sexually active, Milton never unequivocally states that sexual intercourse took place before the Fall. For a fuller discussion, see Kent R. Lehnhof's closely argued essay '“Nor turnd I weene”: *Paradise Lost* and Pre-Lapsarian Sexuality', *Milton Quarterly*, 34.3 (2000), 67–83.

³⁵ The most straightforward way of accounting for this is in the light of the high estimation accorded to married love by the Reformers. Notably, Calvin had pronounced faithful married love to be a second kind of virginity: *Ergo species secunda virginitatis, est matrimonii casta dilectio* (*Institutio Christianae religionis Ioannis Calvini* (Lausanne, 1576), iv. 12. 28, p. 312). But Lehnhof entertains another possibility (pp. 70–71): the roses showered upon the sleeping couple 'which the morn repaired' (iv. 772–73) could be read as an objective correlative of Eve's maidenhood. In which case, after the night's activities Eve's hymen is restored and her virginity renewed. In a very real sense, then, for Adam and Eve every night is their wedding night.

rhetorical³⁶ or fully real, becomes here the chief expression of her innocence, since she will return 'deflowered' (IX. 901) by Satan. Eve

[. . .] like a wood-nymph light
 Oread or dryad, or of Delia's train,
 Betook her to the groves, but Delia's self
 In gait surpassed and goddess-like deport,
 Though not as she with bow and quiver armed,
 But with such gardening tools as art yet rude,
 Guiltless of fire had formed, or angels brought.
 To Pales or Pomona thus adorned,
 Likeliest she seemed, Pomona when she fled
 Vertumnus, or to Ceres in her prime,
 Yet virgin of Proserpina from Jove.

(IX. 386–96)

Martz has commented on the prevalently Ovidian atmosphere at this point, but argues that the unifying factor among these figures is that they are all 'beneficent spirits and deities of nature' (p. 137). As the simile unfolds, it becomes increasingly apparent that what these figures share in common is their virgin state; it is particularly notable in connection with Pomona and Ceres, since Milton's lines openly anticipate its loss in each case. It is at this point that Eve is directly associated with the virgin nymphs of Diana's band and then with the virgin goddess herself under her alternative name Delia.

Eve is likened to Diana, whose 'stern frown' was 'feared' by 'gods and men' (*Comus*, 445, 444), in order to emphasize Eve's 'virgin majesty' (IX. 270) and to help explain Adam's sudden submission to her will. It is a quality that commands Adam's respect and deference, and which helps create the 'awe | About her, as a guard angelic placed' (VIII. 558–59). It is recognized by Satan, too, in her 'awful brow, more awful thus retired' (IX. 537). However, the comparison with Diana and her train accentuates another more ambivalent aspect of Eve's virginal role: her continuing desire for independence. It seems significant to remember at this point that what particularly distinguishes Daphne from other virginal figures in Ovid is not simply an aversion to sex—though that remains a significant factor—but a determination not to submit to any form of male domination or control, sexual or otherwise:

multi illam petiere, illa aversata petentes
 inpatiens expersque viri nemora avia lustrat.

(*Met.* I. 478–79)

Many sought her; but she, averse to all suitors, impatient of control and without thought for man, roamed the pathless woods.

Indeed, until after the Fall the awareness of mutual need is much more acutely experienced by Adam than Eve, but nowhere more crucially than in the discussion leading up to their parting here. After confessing his own sense of being empowered by her presence (IX. 309–12), Adam turns to demand of Eve despairingly, 'Why shouldst not thou like sense within thee feel | When I am

³⁶ Mother Mary Christopher Pecheux claims that, though 'not a virgin in the literal sense at the time of the temptation', Eve nevertheless enjoys a 'spiritual virginity' ('The Concept of the Second Eve in *Paradise Lost*', *PMLA*, 75 (1960), 359–66 (pp. 361–62)).

present' (IX. 315–16)? Eve's determination to play an active and independent part in the struggle against Satan is also stressed in the summary to the Argument of Book IX: 'Eve loth to be thought not circumspect or firm enough, urges her going apart, the rather desirous to make trial of her strength.' The reader is invited to view Eve alongside those foolishly self-reliant virgin huntresses, like Daphne, who, taken unawares, become themselves the hunted.

Satan plays upon Eve's desire for individual distinction by presenting the eating of the apple as a heroic deed by which she will snatch a great destiny for herself and for mankind. In this context we can understand the peculiar force of Satan's choice of words as he represents the act as a challenge to her 'dauntless virtue' (IX. 694). This expression seems to draw its strength from the primary signification of the Latin *virtus* (manliness, manhood, strength, vigour, bravery, courage) rather than the secondary meaning, and more usual English sense (goodness, moral perfection, high character, virtue). However, that such individualistic search for renown is a misdirected form of heroism is evident from the way that the false standards of the heroic order have already been discredited by the actions of Satan, and the invocation, prefacing Book IX, in which Milton makes it plain that the inward Christian virtues of patience and obedience should be considered 'Not less but more heroic' than deeds of physical valour (IX. 14).

Ironically, then, the self-willed assertiveness and determination to confront Satan alone which Eve displays in the gardening debate may seem to suggest that she is already in the grip of temptation. The Elder Brother's warning that the true virgin may pass through danger with 'unblenched majesty' provided that she did not venture out 'in pride, or in presumption' (*Comus*, 429–30) seems not without significance here, while a still more ironic light is cast upon Eve's departure when she is seen to lack the 'dread bow' of 'the huntress Dian', the 'arms of chastity' (*Comus*, 440, 439). This view of Eve, thus weaponless, prepares for the diminuendo effect whereby her 'goddess-like deport' becomes the 'nymph-like step' of some 'fair virgin' (IX. 452) of the countryside, thereby confirming her mistaken view of herself as a heroic figure.

The note of foreboding is further strengthened by her resemblance to the pastoral figure of Pomona, who is specifically described by Ovid as carrying not weapons but gardening tools, *nec iaculo gravis est, sed adunca dextera falce* ('no javelin in her hand, but the curved pruning-hook' (*Met.* XIV. 628)). Martz maintains that this Ovidian reminiscence surrounds Eve with an 'atmosphere of purity and harmlessness' (p. 137), but the allusion is charged with other, more disturbing undertones. Although Martz observes that 'Milton has given the allusion an ominous twist by referring to the time when, he says, she "fled Vertumnus"', even in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* this is not the 'amusing and harmless story' (p. 136) that Martz has claimed it to be. Darker strands are woven into the tale, not only in Vertumnus's readiness to abandon shape-shifting and resort to force to secure his will, but by penetrating her orchard—albeit in the innocuous guise of an old woman—Vertumnus performs a symbolic act of violation which itself foreshadows the closing lines of Pomona's story. The lines in which Ovid describes the enclosed garden in which Pomona has shut herself

away from the threat of male violence clearly draw with subtlety and economy upon the ancient tradition of the *hortus conclusus* as a symbol of virginity:

vim tamen agrestum metuens pomaria claudit
intus et accessus prohibet refugitque viriles.
(*Met.* xiv. 635–36)

Yet fearing violence from the rustics, she shut herself up within her orchard, forbade and shunned all approach by men.

The enclosed quality of Pomona's garden should suggest safety and protection, but when the disguised Vertumnus gains access, it serves to heighten our sense of her isolation and helplessness.

In representing Satan's assault on Eden and on Eve, Milton draws upon Ovid's subversion of pastoral values, in which the violation of a virginal landscape is deployed to suggest the rape of a female victim.³⁷ Indeed, such an interplay is first suggested with Satan's abrupt entrance into the garden just after it is viewed 'as a *mons Veneris*, "a rural mound . . . whose hairy sides | With thicket overgrown, grotesque and wild, | Access denied"' (Le Comte, p. 177). The expression 'Access denied' (iv. 137) had been used by Ovid to describe Pomona's orchard, *accessus prohibet* (*Met.* xiv. 636). Landscape and female figure merge again when Satan seeks out the 'sweet recess of Eve' (ix. 456), but his physical approach is now as circuitous as his temptation will be devious. The unsuspecting Eve, however, will be 'mindless' (ix. 431) of the 'ambush hid among sweet flowers and shades' (ix. 408), just as the unwary Pomona had likewise paid no heed to the warning signs which might otherwise have helped her to penetrate Vertumnus's disguise:

adsimulavit anum cultosque intravit in hortos
pomaque mirata est 'tanto'que 'potentior!' inquit
paucaque laudatae dedit oscula, qualia numquam
vera dedisset anus.
(*Met.* xiv. 656–59)

He disguised himself as an old woman and entered the well-kept garden and, after admiring the fruit, said: 'But you are far more beautiful', and he kissed her several times as no real old woman ever would have done.

Even though Eve recognizes Satan's insinuating manner and unctuous compliments as 'overpraising' (ix. 615), her decisive 'Lead then', as many a reader has remarked, seems ironic coming from one who has rejected her husband's guidance so recently. Moreover, the full complexity of the irony attached to Milton's likening of Eve to Pomona at the very moment when she 'fled Vertumnus' now becomes apparent. As every reader of Ovid would know, Pomona never *fled* Vertumnus—she *yielded* to him. He was ready to force her will, but, in the event, no force proved necessary; struck by the beauty of the god, the nymph experienced an answering desire (*Met.* xiv. 770–71). Eve is seen 'flying from the society of Adam and will not fly (it is a reproach against her) from Vertumnus, the god of autumn and of the Fall' (Empson, p. 185).

³⁷ In 'The Landscape of Desire: The Tale of Pomona and Vertumnus in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*', *Phoenix*, 49 (1995), 110–20, Roxanne Gentilcore has noted how 'Through the sexual images of the enclosed garden and ripe apples, Pomona is made synonymous with the landscape' (p. 110).

Satan's assault on Eve is imaged after the manner of an emblematic conceit: Eve herself, the 'fairest unsupported flower', is discovered 'From her best prop so far, and storm so nigh' (432–33). In a passage of powerful intratextuality, Milton distinctly alludes to the famous passage in Book IV where Eve is first implicated in the fate of Proserpine

[. . .] gathering flowers,
Her self a fairer flower by gloomy Dis
Was gathered.

(IV. 269–71)

Here it is generally recognized that the deeper value of the simile is to suggest that in Eden, as at Enna, the young and beautiful would be abducted and deflowered by a dark power risen up from hell. But the general proleptic function of this association is far from exhausting Milton's use of this mythic analogue. The identification of Eve with Proserpine—through the flower metaphor that they both now share—invests Eve with the poignancy of the latter's utter defencelessness against rape. Eve must bend before the relentless onrush of an irresistible external force that she cannot withstand alone, and the association with Proserpine reinforces the sense of inevitability of the impending catastrophe. However, when openly alluding to the fate of Proserpine in Book IV, Milton invites us to share the ironic perspective from which Ovid so frequently regards his virginal characters. Just as Ovid makes ironic play of the reversal of roles whereby the virgin huntress becomes the hunted, here the gatherer of flowers, Proserpine, is herself gathered by Dis. Similarly, Milton highlights the tragic irony of Eve's situation at the point when her fatal encounter with Satan is imminent in Book IX. Absorbed by her self-appointed task of supporting her flowers, she is oblivious to all else, even the precariousness of her own position: 'mindless the while | Her self, though fairest unsupported flower' (IX. 431–32). So too Proserpine, engrossed by her desire for picking flowers (*carpendi studio* (*Fasti*, IV. 443)), is so intent upon gathering such worthless trophies (*praeda* [. . .] *inanis* (*Fasti*, IV. 433)) that she strays from the protective ring of her companions and allows herself to become the prize of Dis. More damagingly, Eve, unlike Proserpine, has deliberately put herself at risk, and moreover, the assault that she must withstand is not an attack by a superior physical force. Eve is paradoxically both victim and agent of the tragic process. The lines in which Adam laments her loss—'Defaced, deflowered, and now to death devote' (IX. 901)—make her the victim of an evil external to her, while his second thoughts, as he desperately seeks to understand why she has failed to comply with the one condition imposed upon them, return the responsibility for her actions to Eve herself:

Rather how hast thou yielded to transgress
The strict forbiddance, how to violate
The sacred fruit forbidden!

(IX. 902–04)

In contrast to Proserpine, Eve's virginity is shed rather than forcibly plucked. Moreover, her association with the compliant Pomona and her promiscuous readiness to accompany the Serpent begin to cast doubts upon her 'solid virtue'

(x. 884), forcing their significance upon details and events which might otherwise have seemed innocent enough.

Adam's own account of how Eve had initially turned from him contains an ironic counterpoint of which he is unaware: is Eve's appearance of 'virgin modesty' (viii. 501) not so much naive and artless as calculated and affected? For she

[. . .] would be wooed, and not unsought be won,
Not obvious, not obtrusive, but retired,
The more desirable.

(viii. 503–05)

In *Paradise Regained* 'virgin majesty' (ii. 159) is merely another ploy to seduce and ensnare the unwary male that the daughters of Eve have since perfected:

Skilled to retire, and in retiring draw
Hearts after them tangled in amorous nets.

(PR, ii. 161–62)

Moreover, to those familiar with Milton's early verse the lines describing Eve's retreat from Adam's pursuit may insinuate a comparison with the half-hearted flight of an Oread from Faunus:

Atque aliquam cupidus praedatur Oreada Faunus,
Consulit in trepidos dum sibi nympha pedes,
Iamque latet, latitansque cupit male tecta videri,
Et fugit, et fugiens pervelit ipsa capi.

(*Elegia quinta. In adventum veris*, 27–30)

Lustful Faunus captures one of the Oreads, but the nymph saves herself on trembling feet: now she hides, but not very well, and even as she hides she hopes to be seen; she runs away but as she runs she is anxious to be overtaken.

With these lines in mind, Eve's resemblance to 'a wood-nymph light | Oread or dryad' (ix. 386–87) is troubling and ambiguous. Ostensibly the simile evokes her physical grace, but it also hints that she is mentally unprepared for her imminent encounter with Satan and acts as an ironic pointer to the moral laxity she will show in so readily following him. In the dream temptation Satan had clearly attempted to cultivate in Eve a seed of dissatisfaction with Adam, insinuating that his admiration of her was simply not enough (v. 44–47). After the Fall, recollection of this clearly touches a nerve; in lines heavily charged with bitter resentment, Adam now attributes her desire to part from him on the fateful morning of the Fall to a 'longing to be seen | Though by the devil himself' (x. 877–78).

After the Fall the mythological aura surrounding Eve rapidly dissolves. While the spiritual virginity of innocence can never be repaired, the significance of Milton's association of Eve with the Ovidian exemplar of faithful married love, 'chaste Pyrrha' (xi. 12), and his telling choice of epithet at this point, should not be missed. Milton could have hit upon no more fitting way of representing Eve's reconciliation to Adam and her recovery of God's favour after she has been deflowered by Satan.

Through a controlled and inspired evocation of figures from Ovidian myth, Milton invites the reader to speculate about Eve's feelings about her life in

Eden with Adam, giving her a subject position denied her in Genesis. The masterly blending of a succession of Ovidian tales into a carefully evolving narrative sequence contributes substantially to the reader's understanding of Eve, providing invaluable insights into all she thinks, says, and does. However, by deliberately failing to fix the meaning of particular allusions Milton complicates our response to Eve, endowing her with psychological depth and complexity that refuses to be neatly formulated. Milton generally avoids such intensifying and complicating effects in his portrait of Adam, who can seem one-dimensional in comparison. Indeed, while readers have—like Adam, Satan, and even the narrator—frequently felt the fascination of Eve, Adam himself has been dismissed as 'a singularly unsatisfying character'³⁸ who never quite achieves the full complexity of individual identity.

Indeed, the cumulative effect of these mythological identifications is rather to intensify than to dissipate our sense of Eve's integrity. Paradoxically, Eve is never more powerfully herself than in those crucial, defining moments when Milton glimpses her first as Narcissus, then as Daphne, then as Flora, now as the frail and vulnerable Proserpine, now as the unwary gardener Pomona; or when, as she repents her sin, she is seen to resemble the pious and virtuous wife Pyrrha.

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³⁸ Donald F. Bouchard, *Milton: A Structural Reading* (London: Arnold, 1974), p. 55.

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